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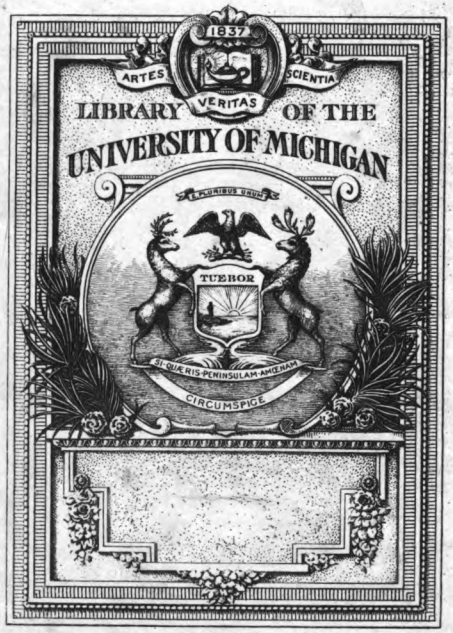
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# THE SPIRIT AND ORIGIN OF CHRISTIAN MONASTICISM

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# THE SPIRIT AND ORIGIN OF CHRISTIAN MONASTICISM

BY
JAMES O'HANNAY, M.A.

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON
1903

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TO YOU

A. S. H.

MY FELLOW STUDENT

I DEDICATE WHATEVER IN THIS BOOK

IS NOT ALREADY YOURS

AS MUCH AS MINE

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# PREFACE

THE work which is here offered to the public is based upon the Donnellan lectures delivered before the University of Dublin in the chapel of Trinity College in 1901–1902. The first four chapters correspond to the first four lectures. The fifth chapter is entirely new. Chapters vi. vii. and viii. correspond to the fifth and sixth lectures. The appendices are new.

The spirit and origin of monasticism is a subject which has received very little attention from English writers. It is, of course, treated in standard Church histories, but not satisfactorily. It has been made the subject of some chapters in a book recently published under the title of *Culture and Restraint.* This book might have been of some value if the author had read the literature of early monasticism before writing about it. Another English book, *The Rise of Christian Monasticism,* suffers from an opposite fault. The author has read the literature, but has somehow failed to grasp the spirit which animated it. I only know one other recent English book devoted



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to the subject—Dom Cuthbert Butler's *Prolegomena to the Lausiac History*. The author refuses to discuss the monastic ideal, and confines himself to the consideration of facts and the criticism of literature. This work is, in my opinion, the ablest recent contribution to the study of Egyptian monasticism made either in England or elsewhere. I am deeply indebted to this book.

If, however, my subject has received but little attention in this country, it has during recent years drawn from German and French scholars a whole series of valuable works. I shall mention only the names of the following, to whom I feel especially indebted — Zöckler, Harnack, Grutzmacher, Ph. Meyer, Spreitzenhofer, and Amélineau. I have referred in my notes to particular works of these authors.

These two facts—that my subject has occupied English scholars very little and Continental scholars a great deal—form my justification for publishing this book.

I am conscious that I have little other justification. I have worked under a double disadvantage. In the first place, I live far from any centre of intellectual life. The Rev. J. A. Bain helped me in selecting and reading German authors. The Rev. W. M. Foley read over a rough draft of the original lectures and made some valuable suggestions. The Rev. C. S. Collins materially helped me in the work of verifying

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references. Otherwise I have worked almost alone. In the second place, I have only occasionally had access to any great public library. One very fine private library—that of the Marquis of Sligo—I have had at my disposal, for which I am sincerely grateful. I have also had the benefit, in buying, of Mr. W. E. Kelly's experience and knowledge of books. Even with these helps I have frequently felt the want of books which I could only now and then consult.

I wish, finally, to express my gratitude to the Dean of St. Patrick's, for the interest he has taken in my work and his unvarying kindness and sympathy in all that concerned it.

J. O. H.

WESTPORT, 1903

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# INTRODUCTORY—PROTESTANTISM AND THE ASCETIC SPIRIT



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His thunder follows! Fool to gibe at Him!
Lo! Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!
Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,
Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month
One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape!

*Caliban upon Setebos.*

Ista est summa sapientia, per contemptum mundi tendere ad regna cœlestia.

*De Imitatione Christi.*

But, Socrates, what is this pursuit of yours? Whence come these calumnies against you? You must have been engaged in some pursuit out of the common. All these stories and reports of you would never have gone about if you had not been in some way different from other men. So tell us what your pursuits are, that we may not give our verdict in the dark.

I think that that is a fair question, and I will try to explain to you what has raised these calumnies against me and given me this name. Listen, then. I assure you that I will tell you the whole truth. I have gained this name, Athenians, simply by reason of a certain wisdom. But by what kind of wisdom? It is by just that wisdom which I believe is possible to men. In that it may be I am really wise. Do not interrupt me, Athenians, even if you think that I am speaking arrogantly; I will tell you who said it, and he is worthy of your credit. I will bring the God of Delphi to be the witness of the fact of my wisdom and of its nature. You remember Chaerephon. Once he went to Delphi and ventured to put this question to the oracle —I intreat you again, my friends, not to cry out—he asked if there was any man wiser than I, and the priestess answered that there was no man.

*The Apology of Socrates.*

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# THE SPIRIT AND ORIGIN OF CHRISTIAN MONASTICISM

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTORY—PROTESTANTISM AND THE ASCETIC SPIRIT

IT is not so much doctrinal differences or political exigencies which split Christendom into the opposing camps of Protestants and Catholics, as a divergence amounting to a contradiction between two conceptions of the Christian life.[1] Dogmas from time to time alter their meaning, or lose almost all vital meaning. It has been so with many of the doctrines which it once was the very life of Protestantism to maintain. Anyone who has watched the gradual change which has come over the theology of English Nonconformists and the alteration at least in the emphasis of Anglican doctrinal statements will readily understand that dogmatic positions, however apparently irreconcilable, have no permanent power

[1] Harnack, *Mönchtum: seine Ideale und seine Geschichte*, p. 1.

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to keep Christians apart from each other. In the same way political situations which once seemed to deepen beyond hope the cleavage line of Christendom have shifted with the rapidity and variety of the views in a kaleidoscope, so that now nowhere, except perhaps in Ireland, can politics or patriotism have much effect in separating or uniting bodies of Christians. And yet, in spite of the loss of interest in the old controversies and the removal of political barriers, Catholicism and Protestantism are as far apart as ever. Protestants may become Catholics, Protestant bodies even may become Catholic in faith and sympathy, but Protestantism and Catholicism cannot coalesce. They have different ideals, different conceptions of what the Christian life is or may be at its best. Men with different goals in view cannot journey far together along a road. No doctrinal compromise, were such a thing possible, could ever unite into one company Christians who look to their religion to produce different results. The Catholic ideal is the ascetic life. The true monk is the perfect Christian. "This," says St. Thomas à Kempis, "is the highest wisdom, by contempt of the world to make for the regions of heaven." Possession of property, marriage, fatherhood blind a man's eyes to life's greatest possibility, the beatific vision of the King in His beauty. The monk's complete renunciation of all which the world holds to be good is at once the proof of his devotion

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and the means whereby he is able to arrive most swiftly[1] and certainly at close personal communion with God. He has taught himself not to pursue satisfaction for the desires of the flesh or the desires of the eyes, nor to strive for the attainment of private ambition or the fulfilment of his own will. He acts upon a conviction that "all which is in the world is not of the Father."[2] This life of absolute renunciation is, according to the Catholic Church, whether Eastern or Western, whether ancient, mediæval, or modern, the highest and completest expression of the spirit of Christianity. It is not a life possible for all. Most men must marry, must labour for wealth, must enter for the world's prizes; and their lives, if they are faithful and honest and pure, will lead also in the end to God. But the heroes of religion, those whom the Church reckons the greatest, are they to whom God has granted the vocation to follow the counsels of evangelic perfection.

Utterly remote from this is the Protestant ideal. Luther's reformation, however justly it may claim in other respects to be a return to what was primitive, effected an absolute revolution with respect to the ideal of the Christian life. In the Protestant view a good citizen is the best Christian. It is in the faithful performance of life's common duties that a man most perfectly fulfils the will of God. In

[1] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia*, II., i. 108.
[2] 1 John ii. 16.

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the lawful fulfilment of his body's functions he comes nearest to achieving the purpose of God who made the body what it is. In making the most that he can, honestly, out of life's opportunities for gain and joy, he best shows his thankfulness to the God who placed him in the world. In the Protestant conception of life there is no higher and lower. All Christian life is on one plane so far as it is genuine. Circumstances may indeed demand of one man that he shall give up the possibility of gain, if the gaining involve a sin, or may pour untold wealth into another's lap; but each is bound in reality by the same divine law, and each, in so far as he fulfils it, is equally the servant of God, equally a hero among the soldiers of Christ. The ideal Christian of Protestantism is brave and strong. He is one who fears God and no one except God. He says his prayers reverently, heeds the divine word carefully. He makes or administers laws with equity. He possesses wealth or gains wealth, and realises that a portion of all is God's, to be given in charity. He is a father of sons whom he trains to be honest and pure.

Such is the ideal of Protestantism. No one can deny that it is a lofty one or that it has borne good fruit. "Protestant and industrial civilization," says Lecky,[1] "has tended to elevate the virtues of good humour, frankness, active courage, sanguine energy,

[1] *History of European Morals*, vol. ii. p. 132.

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buoyancy of temper," and to "depreciate the ideal type of Catholicism," which is "feeble and effeminate." This is certainly far apart from that other ideal. There the strong humanness which seems so good is counted a thing to be conquered. The flesh is to be subdued by fasting. Personality is to be extinguished in unquestioning obedience. The great impulse of sexual love, the impulse which fills the spring with song and the summer with the scent of flowers, which casts the romantic glow men never weary of across the commonplace of human life, is to be annihilated in virginity.

Protestants have not merely rejected the ascetic ideal of life. They have failed to understand it. They have very often hated it, and almost always dreaded it.

An interesting witness to the Protestant failure to appreciate even the artistic possibilities of the ascetic ideal is to be found in the fact that until the latter half of the nineteenth century there was no great presentation of it in English imaginative literature. Shakespeare drew no ascetic. Walter Scott, though he was steeped in the spirit of mediæval chivalry, failed to catch the dominating note of mediæval religion, failed to enter into the spirit of monasticism.[1]

[1] Edward Glendinning, in *The Monastery*, is a great Churchman, a great ecclesiastical statesman, and not a great monk. It is not the ascetic ideal which dominates his life, but devotion to his Church. The Hermit of Engaddi, in *The Talisman*, is conceived as half madman and half saint, but it is the madness rather than the sanctity which Scott has chosen to emphasise.

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Even Browning saw in it only the degradation of a "Spanish cloister," or the futile attempt to bind the strong humanity of Fra Lippo Lippi. George Eliot came near understanding it when she described Romola's interview with her dying brother, but it was not until the publication of *John Inglesant*, in 1880, that English literature was enriched with a literary expression of the ascetic ideal.

We cannot help asking the reason of this failure to understand and the impulse to hate.

We do not wonder that a philosophic historian hates or despises asceticism. He is enamoured of the story of man's great material progress and advance towards civilisation. In his view asceticism has been a clog upon the wheels of humanity's advance. The deserts of Egypt[1] and the cloisters of Gaul swallowed up the very men who had in them the making of a new Thermopylae against the Goths. Even where a half-grudged tribute of admiration is paid to the farms or the schools of the monasteries, it is always with an implication that what the monks did might, and probably would, have been better done without them.

It is natural that the man of science[2] should express his contempt for an ideal of life which involves celibacy. He sees almost infinite possibilities of improvement for the race in the trans-

[1] Lecky, *History of European Morals*, vol. ii. p. 152.

[2] See, for instance, Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, p. 343.

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mission of virtuous tendencies and intellectual capacity to a numerous offspring. Fierceness and barbarism would have given way sooner to peace and law if Odo of Clugny had married as well as Alberic of Rome, and if gentle nuns had not left the work of bearing children to Waldrada and Marozia. The very vocation of the monk and nun was the proof that it was of them that humanity demanded descendants.

Neither is it hard to understand how it was that thinkers steeped in the liberalism of the first half of the nineteenth century despised monasticism. Teaching everyone to read and write was hailed as a newly-discovered panacea for human troubles. A brilliant series of practical inventions seemed to be opening the way to happiness. Men believed in the economic doctrine of *laissez-faire*, and were prepared to let the devil take the hindermost. It is not strange that men like Archbishop Whately[1] saw in the contemplative life of the convent only a "burying of lamps under bushels," or that Charles Kingsley[2] thought that "the spinning jenny and the railroad, Cunard liners and the electric telegraph were surer evidences of union with the divine than the existence of 'saints and virgins.'"

It is easily intelligible that men who move along such planes of thought should dislike a thing so

[1] *Cautions for the Times*, p. 153.
[2] *Yeast*, chap. v.

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strange to them as the ascetic ideal. It is much more difficult to understand why Protestantism should have hated it. For Protestantism is a religion, a great form of Christianity, and not a philosophy. A great Protestant catechism[1] opens with the statement that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever. This is a religious aim. It is not the same thing as the aim of attaining a great civilisation, or of eliminating ferocity from the race by careful attention to their breeding. It is quite conceivable that men might attain to the millennium of the social reformer and yet fail to the last in glorifying God. A perfected sanitary system and smokeless factories and trains would not necessarily make any easier the narrow way which leadeth unto life. A religion which aims, in the first place, at glorifying God cannot have rejected and hated ascetism on account of its tending to diminish the number of soldiers at the command of the State, or (I recognise that the objections make an ill-assorted pair) because it prevented the multiplication of the type that preferred quietness to fighting.

No doubt the widespread failure of the monks of the Reformation period to realise their ideal must have helped to discredit the ideal itself in the minds of religious Protestants. Because the monks whom Erasmus attacked were ignorant, stupid and hypocritical, men came by a natural confusion of thought

[1] The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly, 1647.

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to regard such vices as a result of the monastic system and the ascetic ideal. There were traditions of yet graver sins which dwelt in the minds of the generation succeeding the Reformers, and even yet may be accountable for a certain amount of unreasoning prejudice among Protestants. But taken even at their worst these are insufficient to account for the persistent Protestant hatred of the ideal itself. More than once before the period of the Reformation monasticism had sunk to the very lowest depths of degradation. The condition of European monasteries at the beginning of the tenth century was certainly worse than it was in Luther's time, and yet the spirit of reform then, so far from discarding the monastic life, turned to the monasteries and accomplished its work through monks. Nor is it possible now for men to be greatly moved by the history of monastic degradation in the fifteenth century. It is all bygone history. A remoter past is equally accessible. It is as easy now to appreciate the greatness of St. Benedict or St. Francis as to grow angry over the baseness of the heirs of their rules. Yet there remains in Protestantism to-day the same inveterate dislike of the ascetic ideal.

It is true that Luther's great assertion of "justification by faith alone" cuts at the root of much of the theology of asceticism. I have no doubt that Protestant theologians who have accepted this doctrine and tracked out its bearings upon the

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practical problems of Christian living are bound to reject the ascetic theory of virtue. The whole process, however, seems too remote, too purely intellectual to produce a great popular antipathy. Ordinary men do not work out the ultimate conclusions of the doctrines they accept, and yet the dislike of the ascetic ideal is just as strong among the rank and file of Protestantism as it is among its theologians.

It seems as if Protestantism had retained something of the spirit of those early humanists whose struggles for learning made Luther's Reformation possible. These men[1] restored to Europe that freedom of intellect which ultimately dared to dispute the most venerable dogmas, but they also revived again the ancient delight in the pomp and glory of the world, in physical beauty and in the joy of living. In spite of Pietists and Puritans, this humanist spirit found a permanent home in Protestantism. It blazes up in the life and literature of Elizabethan England. It has been responsible for the unacknowledged aim of glorifying humanity rather than glorifying God, which has lain at the root of very much of the best achievements of Protestantism.

Whatever speculations we may indulge in as to the cause of the Protestant dislike of the ascetic ideal, the dislike itself remains a fact. Another

[1] See J. A. Symonds' *Renaissance in Italy*, especially vol. ii.

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fact balances it curiously. Protestantism has never succeeded in expelling the ideal or preventing its revival in most unexpected ways. The ascetic ideal has haunted Protestantism since the dawn of the Reformation. It has been like a ghost which the subtleties of theologians failed to exorcise, which even the fresh energy of nations living in the daylight of modern life did not lay. It has risen again and again to vex the household's satisfaction in warmth and comfort.

Luther and his doctors were almost as much troubled by the fanaticism of the Anabaptists as by the attacks of Rome. It is but a superficial criticism which finds in the Anabaptists nothing but a wilder and more unbridled Protestantism. In reality[1] the Anabaptist spirit was wholly different from that of Luther. There may be no solid foundation for Ritschl's guess[2] that the Anabaptist movement owed its original impulse to the Franciscan tertiaries, but he is certainly right in maintaining that the Anabaptist conception of reform was mediæval and not Protestant.[3] They were the spiritual kindred of St. Francis and not of Luther. They really attempted a reform in the ascetic spirit, like the reforms of Benedict of Aniani, of Odo of Clugny, of St. Francis, and the others which punctuate the

[1] Zöckler, *Askese und Mönchtum*, p. 573; and Ritschl, *Geschichte des Pietismus*, part i. chap. iii.

[2] Ritschl, as above, part i. chap. iii. p. 30.

[3] Ritschl, as above, part i. chap. iii. p. 26 and ff.

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history of the mediæval Church. Luther's Reformation was something different and something new. He aimed at setting men free to live the lives of honest citizens. The sons of the Protestant Reformation felt themselves to be at peace with God through faith, and being so, had leisure to become honourable members of great civic corporations, servants of commonwealths, whose duties and powers lay upon a different plane from those of the Church. The Anabaptists[1] thought of the Church as dominating, or rather as rendering unnecessary, all functions of the State. They aimed at founding a theocracy, a visible rulership of God. They held a socialistic theory of property. All goods were to be in common among the children of the kingdom of God. Some[2] followed, with the literalness of the earliest ascetics, the Lord's command of poverty, and went forth into the world with staff and shoes. Others[3] declared that they would have nothing in common with the world or the world's ways. They had their rules, like the old monastic rules, about eating, drinking, sleeping, and clothes. Pathological manifestations of spiritual ecstasy, similar to those which appear among mediæval ascetics, were common in Anabaptist communities. Broadly stated, the difference between the Anabaptists and the Lutherans lay in this: the Lutherans aimed at the purification of

[1] Mosheim, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. iii., iv., pp. 6, 524.
[2] *The Apostolic Baptists*, Ritschl, as above, p. 26.
[3] *The Spiritual Baptists*, Ritschl, as above, p. 26.

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society by conforming the morality of the ordinary citizen to the evangelic standard; the Anabaptists, in common with all ascetics, felt an impossibility in this task. They declared that the gospel life and the ways of the world were irreconcilable. Men might be ruled by the laws of Christ, or by the maxims of political wisdom, but not by both. They might live Christ's life and give up houses and lands, becoming, like Him, worse off than the foxes or the birds, or they might live the world's life and try to get houses and lands, laying their heads in better shelters than holes or nests; only they could not live both lives. From their point of view, with perfect consistency, they denounced the doctors of Wittenberg as fleshly, worldly, lovers of ease, comfort, and wine.[1]

After its failure to establish an ascetic theocracy, the original Anabaptist spirit found a certain limited expression in the Mennonite Church in Flanders.[2] The necessity for some compromise with the conditions of life in the world subdued, but did not extinguish it. From this soil it sprang into life again and again, bearing often very strange fruit. Disciples were found ready to accept the mystical teaching of Antoinette Bourignon,[3] and to imitate her virginity. Gichtel,[4] who died in 1710, is typical

[1] Zöckler, *Askese und Mönchtum*, p. 573.

[2] Mosheim, as above, p. 524.

[3] Zöckler, as above, p. 575, and article in *P. R. E.* (3rd edition).

[4] Zöckler, as above, p. 575; Ritschl, as above, p. 232; and article in *P. R. E.* (3rd edition) especially.

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of the sudden revival of the ascetic spirit in Protestant communities. As a youth he was disgusted with the worldliness of professing Christians, and determined to seek out for himself a new and complete way of following Christ. He found what he craved for in the renunciation of property, and in deliberate celibacy. He afterwards explained his celibacy by saying that he was mystically married to the divine Wisdom; but this thought was part of the mysticism which he learned in later life from Böhme, and formed no part of the original ascetic impulse. Konrad Peyssel[1] founded a sect of Protestant monks and nuns, called the Tunklers, or Dumplers. They afterwards migrated to the United States, where they continued to exist up to the earlier part of the nineteenth century. Their manner of life was intensely ascetic. Their name, but not their asceticism, survives still in a sect of American Baptists, who have, so far as I have been able to ascertain, no connection with the original Dutch sect. Perhaps the most noteworthy of these undisciplined revivals of the ascetic spirit out of the soil of Dutch Protestantism is to be found in the community of Labadie.[2] Labadie himself was educated as a Catholic, and was at one time a Jesuit and a priest. Like Gichtel among the Protestants of Regensburgh, Labadie[3] revolted against

[1] Zöckler, as above, p. 576.
[2] Ritschl, as above, p. 194 and ff.
[3] Ritschl, as above, p. 204 and ff.

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the worldliness he found in the order he belonged to. He privately studied the writings of Calvin, and was intensely attracted by the tone of the Christianity there presented to him, although he never fell under the spell of the Protestant theory of justification. He finally went over to the reformed party, but found among the Protestants no permanent home. He was formally excommunicated by a Dutch synod. It was then that he founded his community, with the old ascetic aim of restoring Apostolic Christianity. He conceived of it as a spiritual enthusiasm, pure from all taint of worldliness, and freed from the bondage of law and ceremony.

We are on more familiar ground when we pass to notice similar expressions of the ascetic spirit in England. The sect of the Quakers is very similar in some points to the community of Labadie. We find in it the same determination to stand clear of the world for the sake of spiritual union with God. George Fox was a true ascetic. His breach with his friends, his desertion of his trade, and his wandering through the English midlands, are similar to the things we read of the early Egyptian ascetics. His first followers, while they avoided his extravagances, conceived of Christianity in an ascetic spirit. It seemed to them that the following of Christ necessitated the uncompromising renunciation of much which the Church and Christian society in general held to be innocent. Their refusal to conform to



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ordinary social usages, or to call the days of the week after heathen gods, were, in spite of their apparent triviality, in reality the expressions of separation from the world. When they refused to take oaths in courts of justice they acted literally, as all ascetics tried to do, upon one of the commandments of Christ. Their great protest against war and the use of force was a similar literal obedience. To them the words "Resist not evil"[1] appealed with a force not in any way to be evaded, exactly as "Sell all that thou hast"[2] came to St. Antony as a direct personal command.

In the eighteenth century the English Church witnessed a great revival of religion which, in its earlier stages at least, was strongly tinged with the ascetic spirit. John Wesley and his company of Methodists at Oxford were very definitely ascetic in their lives.[3] They faithfully observed the list of fasts enjoined by the Anglican Church, sometimes so severely as to injure bodily health. Such stated fasts are contrary altogether to the genius of Protestantism. They become, indeed, almost meaningless for anyone unless they are conceived of as a kind of tribute paid by ordinary Christians to the ideal of a complete renunciation of the world. Whether thus apprehended or not, the faithful observance of these—

[1] St. Matt. v. 39. [2] St. Luke xviii. 22.

[3] Abbey and Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 316. Southey's *Life of Wesley*, vol. i. pp. 30, 47, 83, and elsewhere.

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the Church's minimum requirement in asceticism—tends to develop into a fuller and completer self-denial. Enthusiastic souls do not rest content with abstinence on certain days, but push on towards an ascetic conception of the whole life. It is customary to regard the fasting of the early Oxford Methodists as something quite foreign to the after-spirit of the movement. John Wesley himself speaks of the religion of this early period of his life as a walking in darkness. A more penetrative criticism will recognise that the whole of the earlier stages of the movement were profoundly affected by the ascetic spirit. Southey, in his biography of Wesley, repeatedly draws parallels between the teaching and discipline of the preachers and that of various monastic foundations.[1] The parallels are apt, and go deeper than the surface. The rule of life of the society at Bristol witnesses to the workings of the ascetic spirit. No one can read Wesley's sermons, especially those on St. Matthew vi., without being struck by the ascetic view they take of the Christian life. The regulations for the management of Kingswood School impress us in the same way. From the very first, however, the missionary impulse in Methodism tended to obscure the asceticism. At the present day in England, and to an even greater extent in the United States, the ascetic element in Methodism has disappeared. Almost the most un-

[1] Southey's *Life of Wesley*, vol. i. pp. 34, 138; vol. ii. p. 254.

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likely homes for the ascetic spirit would be among the bustling activities of modern Methodism. Yet it is from it that the Salvation Army sprang, an organisation exhibiting many marks of asceticism. The religion of this sect is essentially a reversion to the earliest Methodist type.

The Shakers[1] are a body who bear a strong resemblance to the Tunklers of Konrad Peyssel's foundation. Their origin is obscure, but there is no trace of the influence of any Catholic ascetic order. The sect took its rise in England during the early part of the nineteenth century, but found its home in the United States. Its members are bound to celibacy, which, in the very language of Origen and of the early Egyptian hermits,[2] they call the angelic life, for angels neither marry nor are given in marriage. All goods are common among them, and their societies were originally very poor. They live austerely, and depend for their support on labour in the fields. The ascetic impulse which shapes their lives seems to have sprung up spontaneously in response to a spiritual hunger which could find no satisfaction in ordinary Protestant conceptions of the gospel life.

[1] A good account of the Shakers will be found in *Shakers and Shakerism*, by Arthur Baker. See also W. D. Howell's sympathetic studies in *An Undiscovered Country* and *Idylls in Drab*. Also short account and citations in *The Denominational Reason Why*.

[2] Origen. Hom. 9 *in Luc.*, v. 124, *in ep. ad Eph.*, v. 272, and elsewhere; and *Apophtheg. Patrum, passim.*

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I believe that the spirit which originally animated the Plymouth Brethren was the ascetic dislike of compromise with the ways of the world. A new generation is content to conform to the ordinary moral standards of social life, and to maintain their separation from other Protestants merely by exaggeration of certain theological errors; but at first this sect, too, was bent upon the realisation of a perfect life, and found a hopeless inconsistency in the creed and the ways of ordinary Protestants.

A far more interesting and important instance of the response of people educated apart from Catholicism to ascetic teaching is to be found in the wide popularity of Tolstoi's writings. It has been pointed out, and I think truly, by Max Nordau, that Tolstoi owes his popularity not so much to the artistic excellence of his work as to the earnestness with which he delivers his message. Tolstoi must be regarded as a preacher, a prophet, rather than as a literary man. It is his message, and his own belief in it, that has won for him an audience wider, perhaps, than that of any living author. But while this much of Nordau's criticism is certainly just, he is led, by what he himself would call an obsession, into a curious error about the kind of audience which Tolstoi has found. It is really a sheer absurdity to state, as Max Nordau does,[1] that the *Kreutzer Sonata* has become a book of devotion for English

[1] *Degeneration*, p. 170.

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spinsters of the middle classes. The facts are altogether different. Tolstoi's readers are the kind of men whom Robert Blatchford addresses in the *Clarion* — a class entirely remote from anything which even a philosopher possessed by Lombroso's alienist theories could call degenerate. The readers of Tolstoi who are content to make their way through the complexity of his novels, and to struggle with the confusion of his Russian names, are not morbid and disappointed women, but earnest men in search of some sure word of prophecy. So short a time has elapsed since Tolstoi's novels were first translated into English, that it is impossible to estimate what effect his teaching is producing upon English life. It is worth noticing, however, that a publishing company[1] exists which devotes itself to spreading through the press a knowledge of the text and the spirit of his teaching. A magazine,[2] with

[1] The Brotherhood Publishing Company. Since these words were written this company has been replaced by Mr. Francis Riddell Henderson's Tolstoi Depôt, 26, Paternoster Square, London, which appears to devote itself to the same objects as the Brotherhood Publishing Company.

[2] The *New Order*. This journal has now died out. The last number was issued November–December, 1901. Mr. F. R. Henderson, lately of the Brotherhood Publishing Company, and now of the Tolstoi Depôt, was the editor and publisher. He describes the *New Order* as "an intermittent, unconventional journal, which may or may not continue. It endeavours to promote the union of conduct with the belief and goodwill among men. It discusses everyday questions in the ever-new light; seeks the remedy of abuses, not by legislation, but by peaceful means; records for encouragement the world-wide movement toward the New Society." Many of the writings of Leo Tolstoi have appeared in the *New Order*.

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the same object, is published at irregular intervals, which the public are invited to subscribe for, or if they cannot afford a subscription, to receive and read. A brotherhood[1] exists among the Cotswold Hills, whose members are trying the experiment of life lived along the lines of Tolstoi's gospel. Individuals now and then try similar experiments.

There is no difficulty in forming a clear idea of the import of Tolstoi's teaching. His plots may be confused, but his message is clear, insistent, and reiterated. In the first place, the reader is struck by the impassioned earnestness of his repetitions of hard sayings from the Sermon on the Mount. "Resist not evil," "Give thy cloak to him that taketh thy coat," are treated as precepts which no man must dare to explain except in their literal sense, which are not to be weakened by any plea of the necessity of preserving society from murderers and thieves. The way of living which such words indicate is the divine way. That it seems to result necessarily in the destruction of society and civilisation is nothing, since the way is divine. All compromise with the conditions of life in the world amounts to faithless-

[1] The colony of the "Whiteway Anarchists," as they call themselves, was founded and presented with about forty acres of land by a Mr. Bracher in 1897. Mr. Bracher was imbued with Tolstoi's communistic ideas. Two interesting accounts of this brotherhood were given in the numbers of the *New Order* published in September, 1899, and February, 1901. With the author of the latter article I had a short correspondence, but his letters added nothing of interest to the information given in his article.

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ness and a denial of Christ. That society should hire policemen to defend it, or the nation soldiers, is antichristian.

His teaching on marriage and the relation of the sexes generally has developed in the period between the writing of the *Kreutzer Sonata* and *The Resurrection* into definite asceticism. It is, indeed, an asceticism of a violent and unchristian kind, since he teaches the fundamental impurity of all sex relationship.

His great conception is the brotherhood of humanity. Here he fails only by a very little of a full expression of the teaching of Christ. Unfortunately there is in most of what he has written on this subject a note of bitterness very different even from the Lord's severest denunciations of Scribes and Pharisees. Nevertheless he preaches here a noble gospel, and one that scarcely since the days of Christ has been heard outside of monastery walls.

Tolstoi's teaching is at war with the world and with the flesh. He demands renunciation as clearly as ever any monk did. He disdains all compromise. He is a modern prophet of asceticism.

It is to him that eager Socialists in Protestant England and Protestant Germany are listening. There are men who are turning dissatisfied from the teaching of our pulpits. They find no solid food in the theological philanthropy of educated Nonconformists and

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none in the outworn phrases of revivalists. But they have discovered in Tolstoi an assertion of Christianity without fear of the world or shrinking from consequences. They recognise its spiritual affinity to the teaching of the Master. "This," they say, "is the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth." Alas! They too often go away from it sorrowful, like the young man in the gospel story,[1] for they add, "But Christianity is too great a thing for us." They have discovered that the imitation of Christ necessitates renunciation, and it seems too high a price to pay.

Thus, in spite of definite repudiation, the ascetic spirit has given the impulse to small communities that broke away from the greater Protestant bodies, and has worked a restless discontent in minds educated to appreciate Protestant ideals. It has haunted the progress of our Protestant and industrial civilisation. Sometimes a value has been set upon one kind of renunciation and sometimes upon another, but there has always been a profound dissatisfaction with the worldliness of common Christianity. It is here that the essence of all asceticism is to be found. It is the refusal to compromise, to yield one iota of Christ's teaching for the sake of making life in the world possible, or to follow the desire of the flesh even in ways generally deemed innocent.

It may be that Protestantism is right in its repudiation of the ascetic ideal, and that the whole of

[1] St. Matt. xix. 22.

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this theory of virtue is a mischievous mistake; that it involves an insult to the Creator who made us what we are and placed us where we are, and a failure in the imitation of Him who came eating and drinking and was called gluttonous and wine-bibber.[1] Even so it would be an error worth studying, since it dominated the religion of all Christians for fifteen hundred years, still holds its place in the greater part of Christendom, and has persistently intruded itself even into the sanctuaries of Protestantism. It is as a contribution to this study that I offer the following chapters.

I am aware that we may approach the subject in different ways. We might, for instance, begin by an inquiry into the nature of man and the object of his being. If we arrived at any conclusions, we should no doubt be able to deduce from them the suitability or unsuitability of asceticism for developing what is best in man. Or we might try to form some conception of the meaning and purpose of the Christian revelation, might assume that the future salvation of the human soul, or the present sanctification of the human life, were the objects of the incarnation of the Son of God and His death upon the cross. So we should, perhaps, perceive the righteousness or unrighteousness of ascetic renunciation. By either method we should attain conclusions temptingly symmetrical and self-consistent. But unfortunately

[1] St. Matt. xi. 19.

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such conclusions are just those which the modern mind finds the greatest difficulty in accepting. We instinctively prefer to remain amid certain inconsistencies, provided we succeed in seeing things as they really are. We are more than content if we succeed in wresting from history something of the secret of how they came to be. It seems therefore better to try to discover how the ascetic spirit protested in the past against worldliness, how it found various expressions for itself at different times, how it made for itself a home within the pale of Catholic Christendom. In this way we shall no doubt pass by many questions which we cannot answer and leave many inconsistencies which we cannot reconcile. Our conclusions, if we reach conclusions at all, will be very inferior in their form to those of the metaphysician or the theologian. Yet in this way we may be led to feel whether or not this spirit of asceticism is sympathetic with the great ideal of the Master's life.

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# ASCETICISM OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE

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Unveil, O Lord, and on us shine
In glory and in grace;
This gaudy world grows pale before
The beauty of Thy face.

Till Thou art seen it seems to be
A sort of fairy ground,
Where suns unsetting light the sky,
And flowers and fruits abound.

But when Thy keener, purer beam
Is poured upon our sight,
It loses all its power to charm,
And what was day is night.

Its noblest deeds are then the scourge
Which made Thy blood to flow;
Its joys are but the treacherous thorns
Which circled round Thy brow.

And thus, when we renounce for Thee
Its restless aims and fears,
The tender memories of the past,
The hopes of coming years,

Poor is our sacrifice, whose eyes
Are lighted from above;
We offer what we cannot keep,
What we have ceased to love.

NEWMAN.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

For all that is in the world, the desire of the flesh, and the desire of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

And the world is passing away, and the desire thereof.

*St. John.*

O quam multas et graves tribulationes passi sunt Apostoli.

Nam animas suas in hoc mundo oderunt ut in vitam aeternam eas possiderent. *De Imitatione Christi.*

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## CHAPTER II

## ASCETICISM OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE

THE reiterated claim of asceticism to be a return to the first Christian life and the earliest Christian view of the world necessitates an examination of the attitude of the apostolic communities. Undoubtedly the Christianity of the apostolic age was, in a certain sense, ascetic.

Asceticism is the refusal to make any compromise with the ways of the world, even with ways which are without taint of actual sin. This aloofness from the world manifests itself in various ways. The world loves and honours wealth. The ascetic chooses poverty. The world respects and takes measures to ensure the safety of private property. The ascetic aims at a community of goods. The world encourages the physical enjoyments for which man's body craves. The ascetic practises the self-imposed austerities of fasting and virginity. These things—poverty, communism, virginity, and fasting—are each of them partial expressions of a great renunciation of the world and its ways.

In the apostolic age there seem to have been two



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beliefs which resulted in a more or less complete renunciation of the world among Christians. In the first place, there was the expectation of the immediate Second Advent of the Lord. This has formed, wherever it has prevailed, a motive for ascetic renunciation. It is very natural that it should. If a man is convinced that the end of this present order of the world is close at hand, at once very many things which are usually of great importance cease to be interesting. When a man is looking out in momentary expectation of the lightning which shall lighten out of the East, it will, clearly, matter very little to him how much profit he makes on a day's trading, or what opinion his neighbours have of him. Under the tremendous emotion of such anticipation his body will even cease to crave for its customary indulgences. It is in this spirit that St. Paul writes to the Corinthians:[1] "Brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not using it to the full: for the fashion of this world is passing away." This is an exhortation to asceticism, but to an asceticism based upon a peculiar motive. The expectation of an immediate Second Advent did not long remain sufficiently vivid to form a powerful incentive to asceticism. It has

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 29–31.

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reasserted itself fitfully at uncertain intervals during the Church's history, but it has not been a great factor in Christian ascetic movements.

Another belief operated more persistently as a leading motive for asceticism. The early Christians were profoundly convinced of the reality and activity of the powers of evil. For modern men the whole apparatus of demons and their works has passed into the region of myth. Even to those who hold fast the ancient Christian faith, the existence of demons is an obscure dogma rarely present to the consciousness. To the primitive Christians demons were intensely real beings, and belief in them was the most pressing and insistent of all beliefs, excepting only the conviction that Christ could conquer them. These demons were identical with the heathen gods. An idol indeed was, as St. Paul taught,[1] "nothing in the world"; but behind and within the idol dwelt in some mysterious way the living power of the demon to whom it was dedicated. Thus St. John tell us[2] that the beast had power to give breath to his image, so that it should speak, and —even more—that it could cause those who would not worship to be killed. St. Paul admits that there are "gods many and lords many,"[3] that to partake of meat offered to idols is to have a communion with demons.[4] Athenagoras[5] does not dream of denying

[1] 1 Cor. viii. 4. [2] Rev. xiii. 15. [3] 1 Cor. viii. 5.
[4] 1 Cor. x. 20. [5] Athenag., *Leg.* xxvi.



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the "energies" possessed by the images. He refers them to the gods who dwell behind their images.

There was the Lord's own authority[1] for speaking of the chief of these demons as the "prince of this world." Hermas[2] calls him the "lord of this city," meaning, the lord of the material world. When St. Paul wrote[3] of the "rulers of this world having crucified the Lord of glory," Justin Martyr[4] understood him to mean that the demons had instigated the senseless Jews to inflict sufferings upon Him. It is sometimes not possible[5] to decide whether a writer refers to the visible power of the Roman Empire or the invisible diabolic power which inspired it, so closely are the two connected by the primitive Christians.

[1] St. John xii. 31, xiv. 30, xvi. 11.

[2] *Sim.*, i. [3] 1 Cor. ii. 8.

[4] "Which none of the rulers of this world knoweth: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Cf. Justin Martyr, *Apol.*, I. lxii.: "All the sufferings which the devils instigated the senseless Jews to inflict upon Him."

"The evil demons who hate us, and who keep such men as these subject to themselves, and serving them in the capacity of judges, incite them as rulers actuated by evil spirits, to put us to death."—Justin Martyr, *Apol.*, II. i.

[5] "For the lord of this city will say, 'I do not wish thee to dwell in my city; but depart from this city, because thou obeyest not my laws.' Thou, therefore, although having fields and houses, and many other things, when cast out by him, what wilt thou do with thy land, and house, and other possessions which thou hast gathered to thyself? For the lord of this country justly says to thee, 'Either obey my laws or depart from my dominion.' What, then, dost thou intend to do, having a law in thine own city, on account of thy lands, and the rest of thy possessions? Thou shalt altogether deny the law, and walk according to the law of this city."—Hermas., *Sim.*, i.

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These demons, acting through the world and its powers, which they owned and inspired, were bent upon the destruction of Christianity. Money and worldly position were baits—too often successfully displayed—by which they strove to seduce Christians from their allegiance.[1] The desires of the flesh were desecrated by their dedication to demons. Errors and heresies were nets spread by satanic activity to entangle the feet of the simple. Thus St. John[2] speaks of certain early heretics as having the spirit of Antichrist, and Polycarp[3] recognised in Marcion "the first-born of Satan." Persecution was the last and most powerful weapon. By it Christians were to be terrorised. The rulers of the world when they persecuted were "furious and filled with the devil."[4] It was "the Adversary,"[5] as the Martyrs of Lyons relate, who fell upon them with his might in the persecution which they suffered.

For us now it is possible to take a very different view of the world. After the experience of nineteen centuries we can appreciate the force of the Lord's parable of the leaven working in the meal,[6] and can realise the gradual permeation of the world with Christian ideals. But to the little bands of the first disciples such a conception must have been well-nigh impossible—"We are of God. The whole world

[1] See Weinel, *Die Wirkungen des Geistes und der Geister*, ii.
[2] 1 John iv. 3.
[3] Eus., *H.E.* iv. 14, 7.
[4] Eus., *H.E.* vi. 27.
[5] Eus., *H.E.* vi. 5.
[6] St. Matt. xiii. 33.

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lieth under the power of the wicked one."[1] "All that is in the world, the desire of the flesh, and the desire of the eyes, and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father."[2] To them the only reasonable exhortation was, "Love not the world."[3]

A hundred years after the time of the apostles, Tertullian wrote:[4] "The theatres, the streets, the market-places, the taverns, the baths, are altogether filled with idols." This was also certainly true of the earliest time of all. From the walls of the house where the Christian lodged demons watched him through the eyes of Lares and Penates. Behind the pillars of the temples he knew that demons lurked for him, grimly malevolent, or allured him in the marble limbs of beautiful Greek deities. The pomp of Roman power was the visible embodiment of the kingdom of the evil one. It was in full knowledge that he lay bound in the prison-house of demons that Ignatius flung his final defiance at those powers who had failed to conquer him—"Rulers, both visible and invisible, if they believe not in the blood of Christ, shall, in consequence, come under condemnation"[5]—adding, as we may guess, for the unseen demons who watched him as he wrote: "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it." The Christian dare not attend the public games of the city where he lived. They were held in "honour of demons."

[1] 1 John v. 19. [2] 1 John ii. 16.
[3] 1 John ii. 15. [4] *De Spectac.*, 8. [5] *Smyr.*, vi.

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They "cover men with infamy."[1] To accept an invitation to a feast in a friend's house, even to buy meat in the market-place, was to run the risk of defilement through some mysterious communion with the demon to whom the food eaten had been offered. It was not the opinion of St. Paul alone that "the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons."[2] It was the teaching of the whole Church, as we know from the order of the Council of Jerusalem[3] about meat offered to idols. Certain professions could scarcely be adopted at first by Christians. A soldier[4] was called upon, or might be called upon at any moment, to perform an act of idolatry. A schoolmaster[5] owed a certain recognition to the State religion. Gods[6] presided over every moment of a man's life, from his birth to his funeral. There were gods of food and drink, gods of marriage and of birth, gods even of the thresholds of houses and the hinges of doors. Nor were these gods merely the poetic fancies of minds bent upon a personification of every experience—they were

[1] "Who must not treat with contempt your solemn festivals, which, being held in honour of wicked demons, cover men with infamy? I have often seen a man giving himself excessive airs of daintiness and indulging in all sorts of effeminacy; sometimes darting his eyes about; sometimes throwing his hands hither and thither, and raving with his face smeared with mud; sometimes personating Aphrodite, sometimes Apollo."—Tatian, *Or.*, xxii.

[2] 1 Cor. x. 20. [3] Acts xv. 20.

[4] Tertullian, *De Coron.*, ii. [5] Tertullian, *De Idol.*, x.

[6] St. August., *De Civitat. Dei.*, iv. 8 and ff.

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believed to be real existences. In the view of the early Christians, the world, from the Roman emperor down to the provincial shopkeeper, was literally possessed by demons. "You old Greeks," says Tatian,[1] "acknowledge the dominion of many rather than the rule of one. For as the inhuman robber is wont to overpower those like himself by daring, so the demons, going to great lengths in wickedness, have utterly deceived the souls of those who are left to themselves by ignorance and false appearances." "Before we believed in God," witnesses another Christian,[2] "the habitation of our heart was full of idolatry, and was a *habitation of demons*." It is to a people dwelling in a world ruled and inspired by demons, in a society possessed by demons, that St. John says,[3] "Keep yourselves from idols." To us, perhaps, the words have seemed sometimes a bathos, an impotent conclusion to the earnest mysticism of his epistle. To those who read them first they were a terrifically comprehensive application of the belief that the whole world was lying under the power of the wicked one.[4] St. John might almost as well have said to them, "Keep yourselves from life's pleasures, life's intercourse, business, ambition, riches, pomp"—in a word, "Renounce the world."

[1] Tat., *Or.*, xiv. [2] *Ep. Barnab.*, xvi. [3] 1 St. John v. 21.

[4] See on this subject Bright, *Some Aspects of Primitive Church Life*, iv. 1.

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We are not, however, left merely to infer the ascetic nature of the early Christian life from the prevalence of their belief in the reality and power of demons. We have evidence of an asceticism not altogether the consequence of this belief. The Church in Jerusalem[1] during the earlier years of its existence was a communistic brotherhood, in which the renunciation of private property, if not an actual condition of membership, was certainly the general practice. Probably this was simply an effort to continue the life lived by Jesus and His disciples, where one kept the little store of money[2] and bought such things as were needful for the community. It is not surprising, in view of the way in which the Lord lived, that communism should have been the rule in the Church at Jerusalem. What does seem strange is that the same experiment does not seem to have been tried elsewhere. We have, indeed, a hint that the idea of every member having a claim upon the funds of the community existed among Gentile Christians. St. Paul's[3] word, "If any man will not work, neither shall he eat," shows us the existence of a class who claimed their support in mere virtue of the fact that they were members of the brotherhood. The funds from which such support could have been given must have come from the property of comparatively wealthy believers. In the *Shepherd* of Hermas we get a glimpse of the earliest Christian view of

[1] Acts iv. 32. [2] St. John xiii. 29. [3] 2 Thess. iii. 10.

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wealth and its uses. In his first similitude[1] he contrasts the heavenly city of which Christians are citizens with the earthly city or states which they are not permitted to dwell in as citizens. "Instead of lands," he says, "buy afflicted souls according as each one is able. . . . Spend your wealth and all your preparations which ye have received from the Lord upon *such* lands and houses." He regards the spending and selling of all property as the purchase of those who are relieved, and who will be the lands and houses of the rich man in the heavenly city. That this is his meaning we see when he continues, "For to this end did the Master make you rich, that you might perform these services unto Him; and it is much better to purchase such lands and possessions and houses as you will find in your own city when you come to reside in it." In another place[2] he speaks of Christians who acquire wealth and become distinguished among the heathen as being "two-thirds withered and only one-third green." St. Paul's[3]

[1] *Simil.*, i.

[2] "They who gave in their branches half green and half withered are those who are immersed in business, and do not cleave to the saints. And they who returned with their branches two-thirds withered and one-third green are those that were faithful indeed; but after acquiring wealth, and becoming distinguished amongst the heathen, they clothed themselves with great pride, and became lofty-minded, and deserted the truth, and did not cleave to the righteous, but lived with the heathen, and this way of life became more agreeable to them. They did not, however, depart from God, but remained in the faith, although not working the works of faith."—Herm., *Sim.*, viii. and ix.

[3] Col. iii. 5.

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twice-repeated phrase, "Covetousness, which is idolatry," seems to be enlarged and explained by Polycarp when he says,[1] "If a man do not keep himself from covetousness, he shall be defiled with idolatry." He means, I think, that eagerness to be rich will inevitably bring a Christian into connection with those demons who preside over the commerce of the world. It is very noticeable that so many sayings of our Lord on the advantages of poverty[2] over wealth in His kingdom are to be found in the synoptist evangelists. The fact of their preservation shows that His teaching on the subject was very commonly quoted, and therefore that His anticipations of many men renouncing property for His sake had been fully realised. St. James'[3] denunciation of the rich and his solemn warnings to those who lay plans for extended commerce seem quite in accord with the early Christian ascetic view of wealth and poverty.

Leaving the subject of early Christian asceticism as it affected the relation of the believer to the world outside the Church, we pass to the consideration of asceticism as a personal training, a discipline aiming at the subjugation of man's flesh. There are two main ways in which this kind of personal asceticism expresses itself—fasting and virginity. The Lord

[1] *ad Phil.* xi.

[2] St. Matt. v. 3, xix. 23 ff.; St. Mark x. 23 ff.; St. Luke vi. 20, xviii. 24 ff., etc.

[3] St. James iv. 13, 14; and v. 1 ff.

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Himself[1] set for His disciples a great example of a severe and prolonged fast. He evidently expected that His disciples would at least occasionally follow this example. In His teaching fasting is not so much enjoined[2] as presupposed. He does not bid His followers fast, but, assuming that they will do so, He lays down rules about the manner and spirit of their fasting. Repeated examples from the scanty records[3] which survive for us of apostolic customs show that they fully recognised fasting as a religious duty, and as a means for obtaining special grace on occasions of great importance. It is very interesting to notice that later tradition came to ascribe to the apostles an extreme severity in fasting. Thus St. Peter[4] is represented as saying, "I live on bread alone with olives, and seldom even with pot herbs"—and of St. Matthew[5] we are told that he lived on "seeds and nuts and vegetables, without flesh." A tradition which has some claim to be considered historical relates of St. James,[6] the Lord's brother, that he led a life of great austerity. These traditions are, at all events, an evidence that the early Church regarded the practice of fasting as a natural part of a very virtuous life. It will not be necessary to do more than mention the recognition in the Didache[7] of the

[1] St. Matt. iv. 2. [2] St. Matt. vi. 16, 18.

[3] St. Luke v. 35; Acts xiii. 23; x. 30, xiv. 23; 1 Cor. vii. 5, 2 Cor. vi. 5, xi. 27. [4] *Clem. Recog.*, vii. 6.

[5] Clem. Alex., *Paid.*, ii. 1.

[6] Heges., ap. Euseb., *H.E.*, ii. 23. [7] viii.

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two weekly fasts, and the fact that Hermas[1] evidently observed stated seasons for fasting.

Very much more important, because more clearly divided than fasting is from the life of ordinary Christians, is the expression which the ascetic spirit finds in virginity. St. John evidently regarded the virgin life as one of special honour, and inheriting a special reward. The hundred and forty and four thousand[2] who are virgins follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and learn the new song, which none but they can learn. It is quite impossible that such a passage could have been written by an apostle unless virginity were recognised as a high and special vocation. In St. Paul's[3] first Epistle to the Corinthians we have a description of a state of affairs which it is very difficult to understand, unless we suppose that there existed at Corinth[4] a custom of spiritual betrothal, by which a man and woman bound themselves together for a common pursuit of holiness,

[1] *Sim.*, v. 1, 2. [2] Rev. xiv. 3, 4. [3] vii. 25 and ff.

[4] "The whole of his" (St. Paul's, in 1 Corinthians) "argument does not necessarily refer to actual incidents, but some of his instructions do, seeing they quite clearly contest certain opinions actually entertained. Now here we have something quite different from the ancient heathen tendency to sexual licence. On the contrary, the question was raised as to the refusal of conjugal duty in marriage, and a kind of union of men and women under an obligation to preserve their virginity."—Weizäcker, *Apostolic Age*, iii. 4, vol. i. p. 323.

"Now if we review the whole discussion, it is indisputable that in his decisions on all these questions—withdrawal in marriage, divorce, virgins, and widows—Paul started from one conviction, that celibacy is to be ranked higher than married life."—*Ibid.*, v. 3, vol. ii. p. 388.

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but without actually entering upon the married state. This custom, in spite of obvious drawbacks to it, incurred no censure from the apostle, but met with his definite approval. "He that standeth steadfast[1] in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power as touching his own will, and hath determined this in his heart to keep his own virgin"—his partner, as I suppose, in spiritual bethrothal—"shall do well." Recent criticism justifies us in using the "Acts of Paul and Thekla"[2] as a document giving us an idea of how Christians of the first or early second century understood St. Paul's verbal teaching on the subject of virginity. The apostle[3] is represented as saying, "Blessed are they that keep themselves chaste, because they shall be called the temples of God. Blessed are the souls and bodies of virgins, for they shall be pleasing to God, and shall not lose the reward of their chastity. Blessed are they that despise the world, for they shall be pleasing to God." We notice here the view of virginity as a state of contempt for the world, a conception that, as I believe, underlies all Christian asceticism. The accusation of Thamyres,[4] a typical heathen, simply exaggerates what the writer of the Acts recognises as St. Paul's teaching. "Who is yonder man who

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 37.

[2] Ramsay, *Church in Roman Empire*; Conybeare, *Mon. of Early Christianity*.

[3] Conybeare, as above, "Acts of Paul and Thekla," 4, p. 63.

[4] *Ibid.*, 11.

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ensnares the souls of young men and maidens, and who gives commandment that there should be no marriages at all?" There is no doubt that in the very earliest times the conception of virginity as a specially high kind of Christian life prevailed in the Church. St. Ignatius writes:[1] "If anyone can remain in a state of celibacy to the honour of Him who is Lord of the flesh, let him so remain without boasting." Justin Martyr[2] and Athenagoras both boast of the number of those who for many years have continued steadfast in virginity. There is a suggestion that the possession of special spiritual charismata was connected with the virgin state in the mention of the seven daughters of Philip,[3] who were virgins and prophesied, and in Polycrates' statement[4] about Melito of Sardis, that he was a celibate, and "lived altogether in the Holy Spirit," a statement amplified and explained by Tertullian,[5] when he says that by many people Melito was reckoned as a prophet. It is interesting to notice here that

[1] *Ep. ad Polyc.*, v.

[2] "And many, both men and women, who have been Christ's disciples from childhood, remain pure at the age of sixty or seventy years; and I boast that I could produce such from every race of men." —Just. Mart., i. 15.

"Nay, you would find many among us, both men and women, growing old unmarried, in the hope of living in closer communion with God."—Athen., xxxiii.

[3] Acts xxi. 9.

[4] Polyc., ap. Euseb., *H.E.*, v. 24.

[5] Tertullian, ap. Jerome, *De Vir. Illust.*, 24.

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the Montanist prophetess[1] Prisca teaches this doctrine: "Purity," *i.e.* chastity, "promotes unity," *i.e.* with God, "and they [the pure] see visions." Here, again, we must remember that the great effort of sexual asceticism among the early disciples answers to the Lord's anticipation, that for the Kingdom[2] of Heaven's sake men will renounce the pleasures of married life, and even do violence to their physical nature in the struggle against their sexual desires.

There is a passage in the second book of his ecclesiastical history in which Eusebius[1] quotes from Philo's *De Vitâ Contemplivâ* what he takes to be a description of the early Church in Egypt. The words with which he prefaces his quotation are these:[3] "And the multitude of the believers, both men and women, that were collected at the very outset and lived lives of the most philosophic and excessive asceticism was so great that Philo thought it worth while to describe their meetings, their entertainments, and their whole manner of life." Now I think there is no doubt that Philo was not describing the early Church in Egypt, as Eusebius supposed. It has been suggested[4] that the *De Vitâ Contemplivâ* is a forgery written at the end of the third century, to which Philo's name was attached for the sake of giving a spurious air of antiquity to the nascent

[1] Tertullian, *Exhort. ad. Cast.*, x.
[2] St. Matt. xix. 12.
[3] *H.E.*, xvi. 2.
[4] Lucius, *Die Therapeuten*, p. 198.

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monasticism of that time. More probably the book is a genuine work of Philo describing a peculiar Jewish sect analogous and allied to the Essenes.[1] In any case, Eusebius is mistaken in quoting it as a description of the early Egyptian Church. How did Eusebius come to make such a mistake? It seems to me most natural to suppose that Eusebius was conscious of a tradition representing the early Christian life as highly ascetic. He could find no Christian authority to quote in support of such a tradition, and pitched upon this work of Philo's as giving him exactly what he wanted, although a closer study of it would have shown him that the people described could scarcely be supposed to be Christians at all. However this may be, I think it adds something to the evidence for the asceticism of the early Christian life that Eusebius quoted Philo's book as a description, not of a monastic order, but of the entire Egyptian Church.

I can best sum up the conclusions at which I have arrived in the words of Weizäcker, which I take from his *Apostolic Age*:[2] "The members of the earliest community continued to live fully and vigorously in the words which foreshadowed and enjoined the highest renunciation, the renunciation of family happiness, as well as, generally, of every blessing

[1] See F. C. Conybeare, *Philo: About the Contemplative Life*, pp. 258 and ff. Conybeare's treatise seems to me quite conclusive in favour of the Philonic authorship.

[2] pp. 347, 348.

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of life. No price was too high to pay for following Jesus—home, property, means, fortune, hope, good name, and, in the end, life itself."

While, however, we must conceive of the primitive Christian life as highly ascetic, it is most important to realise that this asceticism was instinctive, unreasoned, unorganised. We meet in early Christian literature with nothing at all resembling the deliberate effort after a special piety by organised conquest of the flesh and flight from the world which is characteristic of later monasticism. We do not even find a reasoned depreciation of physical enjoyment like that of the Egyptian hermits or of Origen. To the primitive Christian the position of aloofness from the world and its pleasures was an entirely natural result of his love for the Master.

"What the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world."[1] "The soul, when but ill-provided with food and drink, becomes better; the Christians, though subjected day by day to punishment, increase the more in number. God has assigned them this illustrious position which it were unlawful for them to forsake."[2] Here is one side of the spirit of the primitive asceticism. The world hated them, and no wonder, for the world first hated Him. It is a very necessity of their position that the world should punish them. But they rejoice in this position. It is "illustrious." The world feels Christianity to be

[1] *Ep. ad Diogn.*, vi. [2] *Ibid.*

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something strange and hostile. The Christian accepts the judgment and responds: "If we are strange to the world, surely also the world is strange to us."

"It is not by ruling over his neighbours, or by seeking to hold supremacy over those that are weaker, or by being rich,"[1] that a man can become an "imitiator of God." But[2] "if you love Him, you will be an imitator of His kindness." "He desires to lead us to trust in His kindness, so that we shall not be anxious about clothing and food." Self-restraint, simplicity, and chastity are "the daughters of each other"[3]—the daughters and grand-daughters of faith. Here is another side of this instinctive asceticism. The Christian loves his Master. He does not therefore greatly care about food and clothes, or being rich or ruling others. Self-restraint is the natural consequence—"the daughter"—of his faith and love. There was underlying the whole thought of the primitive Church a certain splendid optimism about nature and even about society. "To the pure all things are pure";[4] "All things are yours";[5] "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink."[6] From the very nature of the Church's first position this optimism was but dimly felt, formed no part of the working Christian life. That was based upon an instinctive isolation from the world. "We

[1] *Ep. ad Diogn.*, x.
[2] *Ibid.*, ix.
[3] Herm., *Vis.*, iii. 8.
[4] Titus i. 15.
[5] 1 Cor. iii. 21.
[6] Rom. xiv. 17.



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*know*"—this is the dominant note. "We know[1] that we are of God, and the whole world lieth under the power of the evil one." Nevertheless the optimism was there, and was strong in the greatest minds. Even the most tainted institutions of paganism were not felt to be in themselves essentially bad. St. Paul's[2] great metaphorical use of the racecourse shows us that it was possible to recognise some element of nobleness even amid such corrupt surroundings as the exhibitions of the amphitheatre.

It seems quite clear that this condition could not endure. Sooner or later men are always forced to understand and justify the things they do. The Church soon began to feel the necessity of defining and explaining her moral position. Her very growth forced this upon her. A great question came very soon to demand an answer. How far is it possible for a Christian, continuing faithful, to live the life of the world? In other words, must the Christian life always be an ascetic one?

As Christianity spread there were drawn into the Church men of various trades and professions. There came, for example, a magistrate; but he accepted the Christian faith with something like the request of Naaman the Syrian on his lips:[3] "In this the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship, and I bow myself there in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon

[1] 1 St. John v. 19. [2] 1 Cor. ix. 24. [3] 2 Kings v. 18.

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thy servant in this thing." For if a magistrate did not himself sacrifice, he almost necessarily lent his authority to sacrifices.[1] He was bound to receive oaths made in the names of Pagan deities, and to make proclamations of idolatrous festivals. Could a man in such an office be a Christian? Or perhaps a soldier[2] is offered a chaplet in the name of his emperor, to be worn in honour of some god. Must this man choose between sacrificing his commission and apostatising from the faith? Or, again, an artist is converted to Christianity. His trade is the making of images or the gilding of temple ornaments.[3] "This is my trade," he pleads; "by this I make my bread." Or, perhaps, "I have entered into contract to perform this work. I do not worship the images which I make." What is to be said to this man? It is possible to reply: "Earn money! But the Lord prefers the poor. Under contract! None can serve two masters. Take up your cross. Make, but not worship! Is not the sweat of your brow a libation more costly than that of wine?" So it was possible to answer in the spirit of asceticism. So some, and among them the very purest and most enthusiastic of the Church's children, did actually answer in this and similar cases. But, also, it was possible to hesitate, and in the end to answer quite otherwise. On

[1] Tertullian, *De Idol.*, xvii.
[2] Tertullian, *De Cor. Mill.*, ii.
[3] *De Idol.*, v. vi. and xii.

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the one side is the noble and rare spirit before which we bow when we recognise it, the spirit which seés nothing clearly except Christ, and the world only as a "moving shadow show." On the other side is that gentler spirit to which even weakness seems lovable, and the bondage of life's necessities full of pathos. But apart from the conversion of such persons as magistrates and artists, the same problem was forcing itself upon the Church from inside. There were children of Christian parents who loved the faith too well to think of becoming apostates, and yet who lacked the impassioned conviction of the first converts. These came gradually[1] to feed delicately, to introduce into their feasts the music of hired minstrels.[2] There were ladies who clothed themselves in gauzy silks,[3] who wore gold-embroidered shoes,[4] who bared white throats in emptying the wine cup.[5] There were rich people in the great cities who furnished their houses with costly vessels,[6] who slept luxuriously in elaborately carved beds.[7] Such people had something to say for themselves. Every creature of God, they urged, is good and to be received with thanksgiving. The primitive instinct of renunciation no longer shaped their lives.

The whole problem became acute in the question about the theatre and the circus. These of all the

[1] Clem. Alex., *Paid.*, ii. 1.
[2] *Paid.*, ii. 4. [3] *Ibid.*, ii. 11. [4] *Ibid.*, ii. 12.
[5] *Ibid.*, ii. 2. [6] *Ibid.*, ii. 3. [7] *Ibid.*, ii. 3.

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institutions of the pagan world seemed least reclaimable. Down even to the days of Chrysostom, under a Christian emperor, the public games were the subject of Christian invective. Yet there were those among the early Christians who claimed their right to be present at such exhibitions. To our ears their arguments have a curiously familiar sound. "Artistic enjoyment is not contrary to the law of God." "All things, including the bodily strength of the athlete and the musical voice of the singer, come from God, and are good." "The matter is a doubtful one. There is no law of God which distinctly forbids our presence at a theatre."[1]

We see how impossible it was for the old instinctive antagonism to the world, the simple, unreasoned asceticism of the apostolic age, to continue dominant in wider communities. Already in the very first times a step had been taken along the road of secularising life by the apostles themselves. The simplest following in the very steps of the Lord had fashioned the Church at Jerusalem into a communistic brotherhood. The abandonment of this way of living followed the pressure of circumstance. It was, no doubt, the result of discovering the impossibility of communism in a body that was growing and spreading.

In the generation which succeeded the apostles the question of the relation of the Christian life to the life of the world had to be faced. A great

[1] Tertullian, *De Spectac.*, i. 2.

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problem was involved, one of really more importance than many whose solution has occupied whole volumes of Church history. For, is not this the most important question of all—"What is the Christian life? Is it necessarily ascetic? Is it ever ascetic?"

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# CHRISTIAN ASCETICISM IN THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES

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"He saves the sheep, the goats he doth not save."

. . . . .

So spake the fierce Tertullian. But she sighed,
The infant Church! Of love she felt the tide
Stream on her from her Lord's yet recent grave.

And then she smiled; and in the Catacombs,
With eye suffused but heart inspired true,
On those walls subterranean, where she hid
Her head 'mid ignominy, death, and tombs,
She her Good Shepherd's hasty image drew—
And on His shoulders, not a lamb, a kid.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

You stand as a god free to choose. On the one hand you have the delights of reason and intellect, the beauty of that wonderful creation which God made, yet did not keep; the charms of the divine philosophy, and the enticements of the poet's art; on the other side Jesus. You know Him and have seen Him. I need say no more of His perfections.

I offer you nothing but the alternative which every man sooner or later must put before himself. Shall he turn a deaf ear to the voice of reason, and lay himself open only to the light of faith? Or shall he let human wisdom and philosophy break up this light, as through a glass, and please himself with the varied colours upon the path of life? Every man must choose, and having chosen, it is futile to lament or regret; he must abide by his choice.

I do not look upon you as lost, Mr. Inglesant—far from it. I expect you will yet witness a good confession for Christ in the world and in the court; but I believe you have had a more excellent way shown you, which, but for the trammels of your birth and training, you might have had grace to walk in for your own exceeding blessedness and the greater glory of the Lord Christ.

*John Inglesant*, chap. xix.

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## CHAPTER III

# CHRISTIAN ASCETICISM IN THE SECOND AND THIRD CENTURIES

THE first great crisis in the history of the Church was occasioned by her struggle with Gnosticism. It is impossible to describe in a few words such complex phenomena as the various Gnostic sects. For the student of Christian monasticism, however, it is sufficient to recognise that the Christian Gnostics engaged in a series of attempts to bring the faith into connection with the philosophic systems and the wisdom of the different mysteries of the ancient world.[1] They tried to give Christianity a place in a great coherent system of the universe. This was a task which ultimately had to be undertaken by the Church herself. It became necessary, because Christianity came into contact with philosophy. The faith was forced to give satisfaction to the intellect, and to provide a basis more secure than mere emotion for the brotherly love and instinctive purity of the first disciples. The Gnostics attempted to perform this task too soon and too

[1] See Harnack's *Dogmengeschichte*, vol. i.



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hastily. Their leaders had very imperfectly assimilated the faith they were so anxious to philosophise.

The Gnostic sects differed very widely from each other, but they agreed in starting from a common assumption. The world, it appeared to them all, could not have been made, and cannot be governed by a wise and good God. Matter is essentially an evil thing. It stands in opposition to God as darkness to light and evil to good. That part of man which is distinct from matter, his spirit, is held in disgraceful bondage to the flesh. On its intellectual side this theory necessitated the building of vast systems of spiritual principalities meant to connect the incarnate Redeemer with the most high God. On its moral side it involved either a gloomy asceticism like that practised, for instance, by the Encratites, or, on the other hand, a doctrine of the complete indifference of good and evil. Here, then, is an answer to the question which confronted the Church about asceticism. There is no hesitancy or doubt about the Gnostic answer. The world and the flesh are inherently evil. Therefore the Christian life must be severely ascetic. Thus the Gnostic Marcion,[1] as a logical consequence of his doctrine of the evil of matter, teaches that none can receive the benefits of baptism unless they are living in celibacy, and condemns marriage as impure. Tatian[2] and the Encratites taught the necessity of abstinence from

[1] Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.*, i. 29. [2] Iren., *Adv. Haer.*, i. 28.

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wine and animal food, and declared that marriage was nothing else than corruption and fornication. The Severians,[1] although they were widely separated in other respects from the followers of Tatian, taught the same severe asceticism. Julius Cassianus,[2] in his book, *De Castitate*, preached the sinfulness of marriage.

It is clear that this Gnostic asceticism is something entirely different from that of the apostolic Church. The instinctive renunciation has disappeared, and in its place we have a reasoned theory of the world, resulting in contempt for the body. There was much in this theory which must have been and which was attractive to the Christian conscience. It won over, for instance, Tatian, the disciple of Justin Martyr. Yet the Church rejected it definitely, decisively, and for ever, because of the principle on which it was based. The heritage of the Jewish scriptures saved her. She refused to see in Jehovah a being certainly feeble and probably bad. With a faith which is deeply pathetic, and under her circumstances very wonderful, she clung to the belief that the whole creation of God is good, although the world's way of life was supremely bad.[3] Therefore she held that the

[1] Euseb., *H.E.*, iv. 29. [2] Clem. Alex., *Strom.*, iii. 13.

[3] "Seit dem Ende des zweiten Jahrhunderts war es für immer in der Kirche festgestellt, dass der Glaube an jenen principiellen Dualismus zwischen Gott und Welt, Geist und Natur unvereinbar sei mit dem Christentum, unvereinbar mit ihm darum auch jede Askese, die sich auf jenem Dualismus stützt."—Harnack, *Das Mönchtum*, p. 14.

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Gnostic theology was heretical, and the Gnostic theory of asceticism was intolerable.

The struggle with Gnosticism postponed the Church's solution of the ascetic problem. Indeed, it even produced a certain reaction against asceticism. Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, in the year 170, the same who attacked the system of the Gnostic Marcion, wrote a letter to Pinytus of Cnossus,[1] in which he shows a dread of ascetic teaching even where it is unconnected with any suspicion of heresy. He exhorts Pinytus "not to lay upon the brethren a grievous and compulsory burden in regard to chastity." Irenæus[2] quotes both from the Old and New Testaments in favour of a similar mildness of teaching. Clement of Alexandria[3] shows a definite shrinking from strong asceticism, not only on the question of marriage, but also of poverty.

Before the struggle with Gnosticism was at an end, a new danger was threatening the development of the Church. The Gnostics came from without. They threatened to import into Christianity fragments of various religions, to make the creed a patchwork of strange philosophies and faiths. The new danger came from within the circle of the Church herself. Montanism, at least the Montanism which really threatened, the Montanism, for instance,

[1] Euseb., *H.E.*, iv. 23.
[2] *Adv. Haer.*, iv. 152.
[3] Clem. Alex., *Strom.*, ii. 23; *ibid.*, *Quis Dives Salvetur.*

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of Tertullian, owed nothing to either pagan religion or pagan philosophy. It was a purely Christian movement. The Gnostic heresies generally involved an ascetic theory of the Christian life, but the asceticism was a deduction from their principles, and not in itself the essence of their position. Their principles could have been, and were occasionally, worked out quite differently, and gave as a result a life of gross self-indulgence. The case of the Montanists is altogether different. With them there is no philosophic question involved. The whole struggle turned on the question of the Christian life. Since Ritschl wrote his *Geschichte der Altkatholischen Kirche* historians have recognised that the essential characteristic of Montanism is not doctrine, but morality. It is, in fact, a mistake to regard Montanism as a heresy. It is true that to us there seems, at first sight, something wildly heretical in the Montanist claim to special inspiration. Now that it is a very axiom of all forms of Christianity that the books of the New Testament canon stand apart from all other Christian writings, and hold a unique position as a final court of appeal, a sect which claimed direct inspiration supplementary to that of the New Testament could not fail to be recognised at once as heretical. In the second century, however, the circumstances were entirely different. Justin Martyr regards the gift of prophecy, inspired in the same sense as the Hebrew

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prophecy was inspired,[1] as a gift, given of necessity, to the followers of Christ. Irenæus[2] cannot endure heretics who refuse to recognise the gift of prophecy as existing in the Church. Hermas[3] is only concerned to distinguish the genuine inspiration of the Holy Ghost from the spurious utterances of false prophets. Even in the extravagant[4] form of the Montanist prophecy there was nothing which would strike the Christian of the second or early third century as absurd. Montanus[5] regards the prophet as having the same relation to the spirit as the lyre to the plectrum; in other words, the prophecy is purely ecstatic. But this is really nothing more than what Athenagoras[6] says about the Old Testament prophets: "God moved the mouths of the prophets like musical instruments."

Nor was there anything necessarily heretical in the contents of the Montanist prophecy.[7] On the great fundamentals of the Christian faith the Montanists were distinctly orthodox. "The rule of faith," says Tertullian,[8] "is altogether one, alone immoveable and irreformable; the rule, to wit, of believing in one God omnipotent, the Creator of the universe, and His Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary,

[1] *Dial. Tryph.*, 87.
[2] *Adv. Haer.*, iii. 11, 9, and i. 13, 3. [3] *Mand.*, xi.
[4] See Bonwetsch, *Geschichte des Montanismus*, pp. 57 and ff.
[5] Epiph., ii. 1–48. [6] Athen., *Supp. p. Christ.*, vii.
[7] See Bonwetsch, as before, pp. 69 and ff.
[8] *De Virg. Vel.*, i.

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crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised again the third day from the dead, sitting now at the right hand of God the Father, destined to come to judge the quick and the dead through the resurrection of the flesh." The one point in the Montanist teaching which seems now to bear an heretical appearance, their expectation of an immediate Second Advent of the Lord, had a little earlier been almost universal in the Church. On the whole, we may be safe in thinking that the Montanists had no quarrel with the Church's dogmatic position. The entire interest of Tertullian and the sect generally is concentrated on questions of morality and discipline. At first sight it would seem as if the questions of morality raised by the Montanists were trifling, and quite inadequate to account for the vigour and persistence of their schism. It does not seem to be a matter of supreme importance whether a man fasts completely or partially during certain hours of a fast day.[1] The violent objection of the Montanists[2] to second marriages is difficult to understand. Questions as to the dress of virgins,[3] the wearing of garlands, and attendance at places of public amusement do not seem to be of first-rate importance. In reality all these points, however trivial in themselves, expressed a difference in principle and ideal between the Church

[1] Tertullian, *De Jejun.*
[2] Tertullian, *Ad uxor.*, I. vii.; *De Monog.*
[3] Tertullian, *De Vir. Vel.*, iii.; *De Coron.*

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and the Montanists. During the second and third centuries Christians were changing their attitude towards the world. They were learning to look upon it less as a strange country in which they were for a time domiciled, and more as a home. The life of the Church was becoming rapidly assimilated to the life of the world. Christians claimed the right to be in the fullest sense citizens of the empire as well as members of the Church. They came to recognise the world's ambitions of wealth and power as legitimate for them also. Pleasure and luxury, so far as they involved no direct transgression of one of God's commandments, were enjoyed without the disapproval of the Church. More and more men learned to shrink from martyrdom and to avoid it. The fiery spirit of St. Ignatius, which gloried in the prospect of the final trial of his faith, became rare. The supernatural occupied by degrees a less prominent place in Christian life, or was deliberately pushed backed into the past. Miracles became rarer, and men ceased to expect them. The charismata of prophecy and speaking with tongues were superseded, as means of grace, by the ordered ministrations of bishops and priests. Private revelations, inspired interpretations, and visions tended to disappear. As the canon of the New Testament was fixed, direct inspiration came to be regarded as peculiar to the apostolic age. The Church ceased, as a whole, to live in daily expectation of her Lord's

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return. She organised her communities and settled her constitution as if she realised that her stay in the world was to be a long one.

All this amounts to a compromise between the earliest Christian spirit and the world. It was partly a result of the Church's growth. It was altogether impossible for the ever-increasing bodies of Christians to exist without a distinct and powerful organisation. It could not but be that the old conviction of the rulership of the powers of evil over the world should grow feebler in communities which found themselves becoming an important factor in the world's politics. It was also a necessary condition of further progress. It is impossible to conceive how the Lord's ideal for His Church could ever have been arrived at by a sect tied hand and foot by Puritanism. If she was "to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea,"[1] if "the nations of the world were to walk in her light and kings bring their glory and honour into her,"[2] it must be by a certain compromise between the old asceticism and the great ways of humanity.

Nevertheless, the compromise was not made without evoking strong protests. It was viewed with grave distrust by many Christians, and these not the least worthy of the name they bore. Naturally it was in the great centres of Christian life, where the Church's development was most complete, that the discontent of the conservative Puritan party was

[1] Isa. xi. 9. [2] Rev. xxi. 24.



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most strongly felt. I conceive of the appearance of the Montanist prophecy as the occasion and not the cause of the protest made in a conservative spirit against the way on which the Church was going. Therefore it seems to me that speculations such as that of Neander[1] about the connection between the Montanist prophecy and the cult of Cybele in Phrygia are quite unimportant in a study of the true meaning of Montanism. The strife really lay between a party of advance and a party of reaction, and the new prophecy was only seized on by the latter as a divine support for convictions held altogether independently of the utterances of the prophets. Thus it appears of no very great importance to distinguish between Tertullian's pre-Montanistic and post-Montanistic writings. Tertullian's essential position was not altered by his acceptance of the new prophecy. While still a member of the Church, he was in spirit a reactionary and a Puritan. After he became a Montanist he regarded the Paraclete who inspired the prophecy as a "restorer and not an inventor of Christian morality."[2] As an example of the reactionary nature of the Montanist teaching let us take the question of marriage. Tertullian is utterly opposed to the Gnostic view of marriage. "Heretics," he says,[3] "do away with marriage," but he is equally

[1] *Church History*, Bohn's Library Translation, vol. ii. p. 204.
[2] *De Monog.*, iv.
[3] *De Monog.*, i. See also *Adv. Marc.*, iv. 34, and *De Animâ*, 27.

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opposed to the laxity of the Church in permitting second marriages. "Psychics," *i.e.* Catholics, "accumulate them. The former marry not even once, the latter not only once" (Illi nec semel, isti non semel nubunt). He values the virgin state as of superior sanctity[1] to the married. But there is nothing new in either of these two positions. Justin Martyr,[2] Athenagoras,[3] Theophilus,[4] and Irenæus[5] had held the same positions. In the process of her development, however, the Church had come to confine the ideal of a single marriage to the clergy,[6] and had permitted ordinary members to marry more than once. Tertullian was merely contending for a return to the earlier standpoint of the Christian communities. It is true that the New Testament was against the absolute prohibition of second marriages, and it is just at this point that the value of the Montanist claim to special inspiration becomes apparent. Taking his stand upon this new revelation, Tertullian boldly declares that the Paraclete[7] has superseded the teaching of St. Paul about second marriages in the same way that our Lord had superseded the Mosaic teaching about divorce.

This may be taken as a fair example of the Montanist position on each of the various points

[1] *Adv. Marc.*, i. 29.
[2] *Apol.*, i. 29.
[3] Athen., *Suppl.*, 33.
[4] Theoph., *Ad Autol.*, iii. 15.
[5] Iren., *Adv. Haer.*, iii. 17, 2.
[6] Tertullian, *Ad ux.*, i. 7.
[7] *De Monog.*, xiv.

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at issue. They claimed, and justly claimed, to be returning to the primitive practice of the Church. They tried to enforce their return by an appeal to the contents of the new prophecy. The whole position was a reaction against the complete adoption by the Church of the life of the world. In this lay the secret of its attraction for men like Tertullian. The Phrygian prophecy only formed the axis round which the scattered elements of conservatism crystallised into a sect. The object which Tertullian and his adherents had in view was the re-establishment of the old ascetic standard of Christian living, at a time when asceticism was ceasing to be a mark of Christianity. Montanism failed of its object. The Church had the choice of ways placed fairly before her. She might have been a Puritan sect sitting aloof from humanity, snatching, now and then, a soul out of the world as a brand from the burning. She chose rather to be the Catholic Church. She accepted her mission to the world, and went on her way into streets teeming with humanity, and market-places clamorous with the voices of those who buy and sell. The rejection of Montanism constitutes the Church's final answer to the question, "Must the Christian life be ascetic?" In answering this question the struggle with Gnosticism was the first and that with Montanism the second great crisis through which the Church passed. The Gnostics had answered, "Yes. Asceticism is the necessary form

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of all Christian life, because spirit and matter stand irreconcilably opposed to one another." The Montanists likewise answered, "Yes. We deny indeed the Gnostic conception of dualism, but we hold that the Christian life must be ascetic. It was so of old, and it is declared so to be by our prophets, who speak the words of the Holy Ghost." The Church refused both these answers. She cast off the Gnostics because she was true to Jehovah, and the Montanists because she was true to her ideal, faithful to her mission. She refused to be hampered in her dealings with the world by a spirit which insisted on her standing altogether apart from the world. Already, in the realisation of her episcopal organisation, she was preparing to take her place among the rulers of the world, to be the controller of its policies, the inspirer of its laws. In the schools of Alexandria she was claiming for her own the world's philosophies, learning to use them as instruments to shape her creeds. Very timidly in the catacombs she was venturing even to inspire a new spirit into Art. Her children scratched upon the tombstones of the faithful an anchor or a fish. They rudely depicted the Good Shepherd with a kid, not a lamb, upon His shoulders. It was in Irenæus' theory of the episcopate, in Clement's teaching about the Gnosis, in the art of the fossors in their caves, and not in the impassioned protests of Tertullian, that the promise of the future lay. In the

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third century the Church had entered upon her mission of subduing the world for Christ. All that St. John's disciples understood by "the world"—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the glory of life, all the multitudinous activities of humanity, its thought and loves, even its limitations—the Church was claiming for Christ, was pressing into His service. Against the progress of this new spirit Montanism entered a solemn protest—the protest of the ascetic spirit. "Its voice was heard warning the bishops and their flocks of the forthcoming secularisation. It held up in opposition to the worldly Christian that well-known law of the following of Christ in a literal sense, and *longed* for a return to the original simplicity and purity."[1] The Montanists looked back with desire on the old ways. They loved rather the aggregate of communities, bound together by supernatural ties and brotherly love—the simpler following of Jesus without reasoned theologies, the free voice of the Spirit in their midst, and, above all, the primitive aloofness from the world, its art and its pleasures.

The Church's decision was made and her way settled when she rejected Montanism, but she had yet to deal with further efforts of the same spirit to subdue her and guide her course. Montanism was strongest in Asia Minor and in North Africa. Hard upon it came another protest, this time confined to

[1] Harnack, *Mönchtum*, p. 16.

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the diocese of Rome. At the beginning of the third century the Roman Church was divided into two parties. The larger part of the Church owned Callixtus[1] as their Bishop. His name has come down to us in the lists of the Bishops of Rome, and we must therefore speak of the other party as schismatic. Hippolytus, a learned and respected theologian, was its leader, and claims for himself the title of Bishop.[2] The fact that he persistently refuses to recognise Callixtus as Bishop of Rome leads us to infer that he himself claimed that title. We have only one account of the history of this schism, which is given us by Hippolytus himself.[3] He makes a series of definite charges against Callixtus, accusing him of heterodoxy, immorality, and an unchristian Church policy. It does not appear that any very strong case could be made at the time against the orthodoxy of Callixtus. Even Hippolytus himself does not seem to be altogether satisfied on the point. It is certainly clear that there would have been no schism in Rome if the Bishop's doctrinal position had been the only or even the main reason for dissent. On the other hand, the charges against the personal character of Callixtus are definite enough. Hippolytus declares him to have been a slave who robbed his master, a banker who robbed

[1] Dollinger, *Hippolytus und Callixtus*, and Salmon, *Infallibility of the Church*, pp. 384 and ff.

[2] Hippolytus, *Refutation*, ix. 7.

[3] Hippolytus, as above.

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his clients, a convict who escaped from the mines by a fortunate accident. His after-life, if unstained by actual crime, is condemned by Hippolytus as hypocritical. We have no source of information which would enable us to check the accuracy of these accusations, but they wear an air of improbability on their face. Callixtus was Bishop of Rome, and it is not likely that he could have retained the allegiance of the bulk of the Roman Christians, clergy and laity, had he been so bad a man as Hippolytus represents. At all events, the fact that he was elected and remained Bishop is sufficient to show that his private character cannot have been such as to have given rise to a schism. Moreover, I think that a careful perusal of Hippolytus' account of Callixtus will leave a candid reader with the impression that the question of doctrine and the question of private morality were dragged in by Hippolytus as additional justification of his quarrel with Callixtus, and did not constitute the fundamental matter at issue. The real difference between the Church party and the followers of Hippolytus was the Church policy of the Roman Bishop. This seems to have been of the most liberal and advanced kind. Callixtus gave absolution[1] to those who had committed sensual sins, and admitted them to the communion of the Church. He permitted persons who had been twice and even three times married to remain in the ranks

[1] Hippolytus, *Refutation*, ix. 7.

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of the clergy,[1] and allowed those who had married after taking Holy Orders to retain their offices. He allowed women of the upper classes to make marriages of a kind which, Hippolytus says, led to gross immorality. Besides these definite points of objection there are more or less vague suggestions that the standard of morality among the adherents of Callixtus was lower than that of what Hippolytus calls the Church. He says crowds attend the school of Callixtus[2] for the sake of pleasures which Christ does not permit. Callixtus defended his policy and the condition of the Church by reference to the ark of Noah,[3] which contained both clean and unclean animals, and by an appeal to our Lord's words in the parable of the wheat and the tares, "Let both grow together until the harvest."[4] To us such an interpretation of the parable seems entirely natural. To Hippolytus it was a crowning instance of daring and impious innovation. No one, I suppose, now doubts that in this parable the Lord foreshadowed the mixture of good and evil which has ever been the normal condition of the Church on earth. In the third century this was not so clear, and Callixtus seems to have been the first who ventured to interpret the parable in this way. I think we need feel no difficulty in recognising the schism of Hippolytus as parallel to that of the Montanists. It is wholly impossible to suppose, as Hippolytus suggests, that

[1] *Ibid.*, ix. 7. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* [4] St. Matt. xiii. 30.

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Callixtus was a man inspired by the diabolic idea of debasing the morality of Christian people. It is much simpler to think of Hippolytus as a Puritan bent upon maintaining a certain ascetic standard of Christian living and bitterly opposed to the compromise which the Church was everywhere making with the world. We need not conceive of Callixtus as a man of saintly character or far-seeing political sagacity. Probably his policy was dictated by motives of simple expediency. There was at Rome in his time a sect called the Elkasites,[1] whose leader Alcibiades maintained an active propaganda of their opinions. The morality of this sect was of the loosest possible description. They bought converts by condoning every kind of sin. Hippolytus tells us that Alcibiades was encouraged to come to Rome by the accounts he heard of the lax Church discipline of Callixtus. Perhaps we may venture to guess that Hippolytus has here inverted cause and effect, and that in reality Callixtus pursued his policy of milder discipline in order to save from the worse condemnation of heresy some who had fallen into gross sins and might have been driven by despair into the company of the Elkasites. This is of course simply a guess, with nothing to recommend it except a certain plausibility. It would account for a man, such as we may conceive Callixtus to have been, taking certain definite steps along the road of

[1] Hippolytus, *Refutation*, ix. 8 and ff. Origen ap. Eusebius, vi. 38.

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secularisation on which the Church had already entered. Whatever may be said, however, about this particular guess, it remains probable, if not certain, that the schism of Hippolytus was, as I have suggested, a protest made in the ascetic spirit against the Church's policy, similar to that of the Montanists. It is interesting to notice that Tertullian,[1] in one of his latest writings, seems to have attacked the very same policy of Callixtus which was the cause of the schism of Hippolytus. It naturally occurs to us to ask: Why did not Hippolytus himself join the Montanists instead of classing them, as he does, among heretics? I can only suppose that the Montanists at this time were a very unimportant factor in the religious life of Rome. Hippolytus[2] writes of them as one to whom their position was only known at second hand. His account of them is brief, and dwells almost entirely on the absurdity of their prophets' claim to special inspiration. He seems to know nothing of Tertullian, or if he knows his writings, refrains from any condemnation of them. It seems therefore likely that Hippolytus did not understand the true meaning of the Montanist schism, or how nearly his own position coincided with theirs.

One more great schism remains to be named. The Novatians made the last great struggle against

[1] Salmon, *Infallibility*, p. 382. On the date of *De Pudic.*

[2] Hippolytus, *Refutation*, viii. 12.

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the secularisation of the life of the Church. One sin remained worse than murder or adultery, the crowning iniquity of denying Christ. It was against the Church's desire to readmit the lapsed to communion that the Novatians protested.

Henceforth the Church is catholic in her wide gentleness towards every weakness of humanity, in her merciful love for all sinners who are ready to submit to her. She has travelled far from the original conception of a community of saints, all washed, all sanctified, all justified; far from the ideal of that little company of disciples who stood aloof from the whole world lying under the power of the evil one, who could not sin because the seed of Him[1] was abiding in them. Instead of a community of saints, the Church has become a school for righteousness. Instead of an unworldly brotherhood, she has grown to be a great world-power, bent upon the reform of all life and the education of all humanity.

This is her answer to the question: Must the Christian life be ascetic? Some, and they not the least worthy of her children, asserted vehemently that it must. The Church said: No. In view of her mission to the world, she cannot and will not refuse to open her gates as wide as possible. Nevertheless, there was in the protests of the Puritan sects, of Tertullian, Hippolytus, and

[1] 1 St. John iii. 9.

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Novatian, an element of truth. Asceticism does form a part of the teaching of Christ. The perfect way of following Him must ever be by contempt of the world. His words about hating[1] father and mother, and wife and child, for His sake, about selling[2] all and following Him in poverty like His own poverty, about making[3] of oneself a eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake, were not spoken without purpose and meaning. They set forth an ideal which is the very salt preserving the body from corruption. They display an aspect of Christianity which cannot be neglected, which has never allowed itself to be forgotten. Thus when the first question about asceticism has been asked and answered—when it is clear that all Christian life cannot be kept to this ascetic standard—there remains another question: How does asceticism come into the scheme of Christian living? What is the relation of asceticism to the common life of the Church?

All the while that the Puritan sects were making their protests this second question was beginning to find for itself an answer. In Asia Minor and in North Africa the members of the Church who valued asceticism had naturally ranged themselves with the Montanists. In Rome they had gathered round Hippolytus and Novatian. In Syria and in Egypt these sects had no great following. The ascetic

[1] St. Luke xiv. 26. [2] St. Matt. xix. 21. [3] St. Matt. xix. 12.

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spirit in these regions found for itself a different expression, and succeeded in adapting itself to the altered conditions of the Church's life. We may say that in Asia Minor, Carthage, and Rome the ascetic spirit entered upon a blind alley, a path that led no further, when it protested by schism against the secularisation of the Christian life. In Syria and Egypt, on the other hand, it entered upon the way of true development. It is here that we may trace the links which connected the instinctive asceticism of the apostolic age with the great movement which St. Antony inaugurated, and which grew into Christian monasticism.

Some time during the latter half of the second century, Narcissus,[1] Bishop of Jerusalem, retired from his see into the wilderness. He was an ascetic and a worker of miracles before his adoption of a solitary life. To him, so far as we know, belongs the title of the first Christian hermit, although his example was not followed by others. He retired from the world and the Church because he could no longer endure the struggle which his office entailed against evil men and slanderous tongues. He made no effort to gather disciples or to set up a purer Church. Simply in obedience to an unconquerable hunger for righteousness, he went away to find peace and space for personal communion with his Lord.

Narcissus is, however, only a solitary example of

[1] Euseb., *H.E.*, vi. 9.

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such a development of the ascetic life. Very much more interesting are the ascetics described in the Pseudo-Clementine epistles to virgins. I follow Harnack and Zöckler in supposing that these documents belong to the early part of the third century, and to the region of southern Syria. They consist of a series of exhortations to certain ascetics who led a wandering life and devoted themselves to the task of exhorting and strengthening the brethren in the various centres of Christian life which they visited. Minute[1] regulations are laid down with a view to the maintaining of personal purity, and a long list of biblical examples are produced to show the value of the ascetic life. The ascetics to whom these epistles are addressed form an intermediate type[2] between the asceticism of the first Christianity and that of the

[1] The ascetics of the Pseudo-Clementine epistles were exhorted not "to eat and drink with maidens at entertainments," not to "meet together for vain and trifling conversation and merriment, speaking evil of one another" (chap. x.). There were various regulations laid down as to the behaviour of the ascetics in the different places they stayed at during their wanderings. In a place where there are no Christian men, but all believers are women and maidens, "We select in order to pass the night there, a woman who is aged and the most exemplary of them all; and we speak to her to give us a place all to ourselves, where no woman enters, nor maiden" (i. chap. iv.). If they came to a place and found there one believing woman only, they fled from that place, not that they disdained the believing woman, but because, she being alone, they were afraid lest anyone should make insinuations against them in words of falsehoods. "For blessed is that man who is circumspect and fearful in everything for the sake of purity" (ii. chap. vi.).

[2] Zöckler, *Askese u. Mönchtt.*, pp. 178 and ff.

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Egyptian deserts. This is the idea which Harnack[1] gives us of them when he says, "Called into existence by the mighty strength and spirituality of the original impulse, their form of life could continue to exist only so long as this impulse endured. Afterwards it must either pass away or change into the life of the hermitage." We are reminded, on the one hand, in reading these epistles, of the prophets described in the Didache, and, on the other hand, there is suggested to us the accounts which Cassian and St. Jerome give of the wandering, unorganised monks of the fourth century. We have in these ascetics a survival of the original Christian spirit of aloofness from the world, just as we have in Montanism. Here, however, instead of making a reactionary protest, this spirit adapted itself and found a position, which although tenable only for a time, shows no trace of opposition to the Church, or tendency towards separation.

It has been assumed that Eusebius[2] knew nothing of Egyptian monasticism, because he never mentions St. Antony or any of the other great hermits. The assumption appears to me an unsafe one. It is certain that Eusebius did know of an ascetic life distinctly different, and generally recognised and felt to be different, from the life of ordinary members

[1] Harnack, *Sitz.-Ber.*, p. 383.

[2] Weingarten, art. "Mönch.," *P. R. E.*, 2nd ed., pp. 764-66; also in *Urspr. d. Mönch*, pp. 6-10.

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of the Church. He speaks of this life as being the "perfect way."[1] He even uses the name monks[2] (*μοναχοί*) for the ascetics whom he describes, but perhaps he means no more than that they were apart from ordinary Christians in their manner of life. It is clearly to be seen from his book on the *Martyrs of Palestine* that there were at the end of the third century, in the region of Syria, ascetics living in full communion with the Church, and yet occupying a position distinct from that of ordinary Christians. Thus there is mention of Apphianus, an "athlete of piety,"[3] that is to say, an ascetic. This metaphorical use of the word athlete to denote an ascetic striver after perfection probably had its origin in St. Paul's writings. It is common in the accounts of the fourth-century Egyptian hermits. Ennathas,[4] a woman, is adorned with a chaplet of virginity. Peter,[5] who was martyred at Cæsarea, was an "ascetic." Of his friend Pamphilus,[6] Eusebius relates that he despised the world and earthly hopes, shared his possessions with the needy, and was celebrated for philosophic deportment and asceticism. The use of the words philosopher and philosophic in this connection deserve notice. Seleucus,[7] once a soldier, after he left the army set himself diligently to imitate the religious ascetics.

From the same region we have a work called *The*

[1] *Dem. Evang.*, i. 8, 9. [2] Comm. in Ps. lxviii. 7.
[3] v. 2. [4] ix. 6. [5] x. 2. [6] xi. 2. [7] xi. 20.



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*Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, written by Methodius, Bishop of Tyre. This is a very interesting work, consisting mainly of mystical speculations about the value and sanctity of the virgin life. To us it is especially valuable as a witness to the separation which had taken place in the Church between those who specially dedicated themselves to the service of God by asceticism and virginity and those who lived the life of ordinary citizens. The distinction is clearly marked in Methodius' treatise. The ascetic life is the higher and more honourable. Virgins have the special honour of following the Lamb, Himself the chief virgin,[1] whithersoever He goeth. Their number is but small, whereas the other saints constitute a great multitude whom no man can number.

[1] Methodius speaks of virginity "as something supernaturally great, wonderful, and glorious; and to speak plainly, and in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, this best and noblest manner of life alone is the root of immortality, and also its flower and first fruits" (Dis. i. 1). In the fifth chapter he writes: "Our Lord preserved the flesh which He had taken upon Him incorrupt in virginity, so that we also, if we would come to the likeness of God and Christ, should endeavour to honour virginity. For the likeness of God is the avoiding of corruption." Passing on to Discourses vi. and vii., we find other speculations regarding the value and sanctity of the virgin life. "Our beauty is best preserved undefiled and perfect, when protected by virginity—it is not darkened by the heat of corruption from without—but, remaining in itself, it is adorned with righteousness, being brought as a bride to the Son of God" (vi. 3). "The praises of virginity," writes Methodius, "are quite clear, in the Song of Songs, to anyone who is willing to see it, where Christ Himself, praising those who are firmly established in virginity, says, 'As the lily among thorns, so is My love among the daughters,' comparing the grace of chastity to the lily, on account of its purity and fragrance, and sweetness and joyousness" (vii. 1).

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I ought to note that, strictly speaking, both the book on the *Martyrs of Palestine* and *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins* belong to the beginning of the fourth century, and not end of the third. Methodius was martyred in 312 A.D., Pamphilus and his companions probably in 309. I think, however, that we are justified in assuming that the position of the ascetics and their relation to the rest of the Church was substantially the same in the closing years of the third century as it was at the beginning of the fourth.

I believe, then, that with the aid of the Pseudo-Clementine epistles to virgins, Eusebius' *Martyrs of Palestine*, and Methodius' *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, we are able to trace the development of asceticism in Syria and Palestine during the third century. Originally here as everywhere asceticism was an instinctive, unreasoned expression of that aloofness from the world which was the natural result of the first Christian enthusiasm. As Christians came more and more to accept the citizenship of the world, and to recognise the world as at least for a time their home, asceticism where it survived became conscious of itself, and conscious of a certain aloofness from ordinary Christian society. This society it in no way condemned, although it claimed and received for itself special honour as the highest form of Christian living. In the physical evolution of the higher forms of animal life from the protozoon,

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certain portions of the protoplasm set themselves apart for specialisation into the organs which possess the senses of sight and hearing. Sensitiveness to light, which was in some degree common to the whole body of the protozoon, got lost in process of development to all parts of the organism except those which had specialised into organs of sight, but in these organs was immensely intensified. Just so in the development of the Christian Church, the vague asceticism which was once common to all believers specialised for the production of a certain kind of life, deliberately ascetic, sometimes very severely ascetic, tending always to become more and more clearly differentiated from ordinary Christianity.

Egypt, which was destined in the next century to give birth to Christian monasticism, was in the earlier part of the third century the home of Origen. In the description which Eusebius[1] gives of Origen's life we read that it was lived in voluntary poverty, in cold and nakedness, in virginity. He strove for the conquest of his flesh by fasting, by the discipline of doing without sleep, and austerity in clothing. He endeavoured to follow literally the ascetic teaching of Christ. In fact, there is scarcely a note of later ascetic practice which is absent from the life of Origen. There are passages in the panegyric of Gregory Thaumaturgus which show that the asceti-

[1] Eus., *H.E.*, vi. 3.

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cism of Origen's life had considerable influence in attracting disciples to his teaching. There must have been many men in the Egyptian Church who conceived of the Christian life as an ascetic one in the same way that Origen did. It is hardly possible for a man to enter upon and work out an ascetic plan of life as Origen did unless amid more or less sympathetic surroundings. Origen's teaching is, however, much more important in the study of Christian asceticism than his life. In it we find every form of asceticism recommended and even passionately pressed upon his disciples. On the subject of voluntary poverty, he says: "If we follow the law of Christ, it does not permit us to have possessions of land or houses in cities. Why do I say houses? We are not permitted to have many tunics or much money, for it says, having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."[1] "When a man has learnt to despise the vanity of the world and has realised the perishable nature of the things that are passing away, and has arrived at the point of renouncing the world and all that is in it, then as a consequence he will come to contemplate and desire those things which are not seen, but are eternal."[2] "I, if I renounce all that I have and take up my cross and follow Christ, bring a whole burnt offering to the altar of God."[3] He speaks of those who embrace

[1] Hom. xv. in Lev. ix.
[2] In Cant. xiv.
[3] Hom. ix. in Lev. ix.

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the virgin life as "following the example of many saints and of Jesus Christ."[1] He compares the flesh to the sacrificial victim. "Lay thy hand," he says,[2] "upon thy victim, that it may be acceptable to the Lord, and slay it before the Lord, that is, place upon it the bridle of continence, lay on it the hands of discipline, and take them not off from it." Speaking of almsgiving, visiting the sick, and other deeds of mercy, he says: "Whoso does these things anoints the feet of the Lord. But he who is eager in chastity, steadfast in fasts and prayers—which things are not of profit to other men, but only go for the glory of God—this is an ointment which anoints the head of the Lord Christ, and thence flows through His whole body, that is, the Church; and this is the truly precious ointment, whose odour fills the whole house, that is, the Church of Christ. And this work belongs not to the penitents, but to the perfect saints."[3] He speaks of those who lead a contemplative life of ceaseless prayer and meditation as being the "altar of incense in the temple of God,"[4] and as "the few near neighbours of Jesus Christ, His few relatives and sons, who are partakers of His word and capable of His wisdom."[5]

I have cited here a few passages only from a long list collected by Bornemann, and published in his

[1] *Ep. ad. Rom.*, vi. 141.
[2] Hom. i. in Lev. ix.
[3] In Matt. iv.
[4] Hom. v. in Num. x.
[5] Hom. ii. in Gen. viii.

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deeply interesting and suggestive essay[1] on the origin of Christian monasticism. To this essay, which is easily accessible, I refer anyone who wishes to supplement the few that I have quoted. These, I hope, are sufficient to give an idea of Origen's ascetic teaching. Most striking is its philosophic note. Asceticism is here contemplated as opening the eyes to eternal things by weaning them from the vision of the temporal world. It is by virginity that a man offers his body a mystical sacrifice to Christ. The conquest of the flesh by fasting, and the absorption of the spirit in prayer and meditation are the conditions of approach to the inmost intimacy with the divine. This is nothing less than a philosophy of asceticism. Origen is here far in advance of his contemporaries. He had faced and thought out the difficult question of the relation of the ascetic life to that of ordinary Christians. He arrived at the solution which the Church ultimately adopted of the distinction between counsels of perfection and the obligatory precepts of the gospel. On this point we find no teaching so clear as his, and generally no philosophy of asceticism so complete as his, until we read the writings of St. Ambrose of Milan. Cassian's *Conferences* show something of the same introspective reflectiveness; but in the literature of his own or the two succeeding genera-

[1] "In investiganda Monachatus origine quibus de causis ratio habenda sit Origenis,"

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tions of ascetics there is nothing at all comparable to what Origen wrote. The titles under which he speaks of the ascetic life are instructive and suggestive. He calls it "The Evangelic perfection," "The Apostolic life," "The Angelic life," "The Imitation of Christ," "The Divine philosophy." In none of these titles does Origen speak the language of his contemporaries. Among the Egyptian monks a century later we read of virginity as the angelic life and poverty as the apostolic life. Palladius calls asceticism a philosophy. In the title "Evangelic perfection," Origen anticipates the doctrine of counsels and precepts, which was not yet generally apprehended in his own time. "The Imitation of Christ" is of all titles of the ascetic life the most familiar in our ears, but I think that the idea of modelling life upon the external circumstances of the Lord's life, such as His virginity and poverty, as distinguished from trying to shape life according to the spirit which animated His life, was hardly yet in Origen's time a familiar idea even to ascetics. This idea of literally imitating the life of Christ appears in the Pseudo-Clementine epistles to virgins. We find it afterwards in Methodius. In each case it results, as indeed it must, in a glorification of asceticism.

Elsewhere in the Church men were struggling to enforce a minimum of ascetic renunciation as an essential part of Christian life, or were inarticulately working out a personal call to a life of uncom-

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promising self-denial. In Alexandria and Cæsarea Origen realised that asceticism was for the few and not for the multitude—for those who had the vocation to become the intimates of Jesus Christ,—but that for them it meant something very great, and made demands not to be satisfied with anything less than complete renunciation.

Because Origen was so far in advance of his contemporaries, I cannot think that his teaching gave the impulse to the movement which St. Antony inaugurated. The first monks did not philosophise about asceticism. They simply lived ascetic lives. Origen taught all that they practised, but they did not learn it from him. There was indeed a group of Origenistic monks in the Nitria during the second half of the fourth century. How far they understood and absorbed Origen's ascetic teaching, as distinguished from his peculiar and heretical doctrines, we are unable to determine, but certainly at the time of its foundation the asceticism of this society was not philosophic. I shall touch more fully on the question of the original impulse of Egyptian desert asceticism in the next chapter. Here it will be sufficient to point out that Origen had disciples who learnt their asceticism from him, and that they were very different from St. Antony, St. Macarius, and the other hermits and cœnobites. Pierius, called by St. Jerome Origenes Junior, was an ascetic who embraced a life of virginity and voluntary poverty.

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He was an erudite philosopher, a skilful reasoner. He indulged in obscure speculations. He was well known as a preacher. In expounding the first Epistle to the Corinthians he says, "Paul without disguise preaches celibacy."[1] Hierakas founded at Leontopolis a community — half monastery, half academy.. He and his disciples practised artistic copying of manuscripts, and thereby earned their living. He, like Pierius, speculated and philosophised. Finally he drifted into heresy. In his opinion the Gospel was superior to the old Jewish law[2] only because it taught virginity, while the old law permitted marriage. This is the kind of disciple which Origen's ascetic philosophy found in the third century. It is clear that Pierius and Hierakas were men of a wholly different kind from St. Antony.

It is, indeed, very probable that Origen's teaching had a profound influence on Christian monasticism, but its sphere must be sought not in the lives of the hermits, but in the writings of men like St. Ambrose and St. Bernard.

I have endeavoured in this chapter to indicate the various expressions of the ascetic spirit which still continued active and influential, in spite of the general approximation of the Christian life to the life of the world. I consider that a right under-

[1] Jer., *Ep. ii. ad Pammach.*
[2] Epiphan. *Haer.*, 67.

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standing of the impulse which gave rise to the great Puritan schisms of the Montanists and of Hippolytus, and some knowledge of the specialisation of the ascetic life and the beginnings of ascetic philosophy during the second and third centuries, to be absolutely essential for a study of the origin of Christian monasticism. Without such knowledge we are apt to be led into the common error of regarding fourth-century monasticism as something entirely new in Christianity, instead of recognising it as simply a new expression of a spirit present from the very first in the Church. Whoever realises the power and activity of the ascetic spirit in the second and third centuries is likely at least to avoid the error of trying to account for monasticism by supposing it to be a corruption of Christianity, unawares brought in from Neo-Platonic philosophy, the customs of pagan religions, or the creeds of oriental dualists.

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# ST. ANTONY AND EARLY EGYPTIAN MONASTICISM

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Quid tu, relictis urbibus,
Mortalium consortia
Timens fugis? Quid tu vides
Solusque tecum cogitas?

Mentis volatu libero,
Percurris aeternas domos;
Et quae negas mortalibus,
Transfers Deo commercia.

Praesens choris coelestibus,
Sacro quietus otio,
Tutus tuendo Numini,
Totus colendo tu vacas.

Quam pura, qui te diligunt,
O Christe, libant gaudia!
Te propter antris abditos
Sinu recondis in tuo.

*Paris Breviary.*

Magna ars est scire conversari cum Jesu.

*De Imitatione Christi.*

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them.
The desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose.
They shall see the glory of the Lord and the excellency of our God.
In the wilderness shall waters break out and streams in the desert.
And the parched land shall become a pool and the thirsty land springs of water.
In the habitation of dragons where each lay shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

*Isaiah.*

Oh for one minute hark what we are saying!
This is not pleasure that we ask of Thee!
Nay, let all life be weary with our praying,
Streaming of tears and bending of the knee.

Only we ask thro' shadows of the valley
Stay of Thy staff and guiding of Thy rod,
Only when rulers of the darkness rally,
Be Thou beside us, very near, O God!

*F. W. H. Myers.*

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## CHAPTER IV

# ST. ANTONY AND EARLY EGYPTIAN MONASTICISM[1]

HITHERTO we have been obliged to deal with movements rather than men, with the manifestations of a spirit rather than the actions of individuals. We now arrive at a period when Christian asceticism emerges into the light of history as a great and clearly discernible phenomenon. It is henceforth associated with the lives and teachings of great leaders. The first of these is St. Antony.

His parents were Egyptian[2] landowners in comfortable circumstances, perhaps actually rich. St. Antony was born in a small town called Coma. As a boy he showed a disinclination[3] to share the studies and the play of his schoolfellows, and grew up in consequence almost entirely without learning. When he was eighteen years old[4]—in the year 258—his parents died, leaving him in possession of the family property. He was profoundly dissatisfied with his

[1] Almost all the passages referred to in this chapter are to be found in Rosweyd's *Vitæ Patrum*, accessible easily in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, vols. lxxiii. and lxxiv.

[2] *Vita Antonii*, i., and Soz., *H.E.*, i. 13. [3] *Vit. Ant.*, i. [4] *Ibid.*, ii.



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position. His mind was filled with thoughts about the life of the apostles,[1] who had left all to follow Jesus, and about those early disciples at Jerusalem who had embraced a life of poverty, selling all their possessions and laying the price of them at the apostles' feet. It happened one day[2] that he heard read in church that portion of the gospel in which the rich young man was bidden to sell all that he had and follow Jesus. The words,[3] "Go and sell all that thou hast" appealed to him as a direct personal call. He left the church and obeyed. All his land he gave to the villagers. All his other property he sold, and distributed the price among the poor,[4] reserving only a small sum for the use of his sister.[5] Shortly afterwards he was again in church, and heard this time the words, "Be not anxious for the morrow." He then parted with even the small remnant of his property which he had kept for his sister. From this time on his life was entirely devoted to the pursuit of holiness. At first he went to and fro among the older ascetics, who, without withdrawing from human society, were making special efforts to imitate the life of Christ. From each of these he learnt some lesson.[6] In one he saw the beauty of graciousness; in another he admired endurance in fasting; in others meekness and freedom from anger. He strove to imitate each in what seemed

[1] *Vit. Ant.*, ii. [2] *Ibid.*, ii. [3] St. Matt. xix. 21.
[4] *Vit.*, iii. [5] Cass., *Conf.*, iii. 4. [6] *Vit.*, iv.

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a great achievement. So genuine and unaffected was his piety that men loved him for it, and gave him the name of "God beloved."[1] But while he won the admiration of good men, he excited the envy of the devil. The saint was sorely tempted to go back from the path on which he had entered. He remembered the wealth he had given up, and all the pleasure and power it might have brought him. He felt, as all men do at some time, the force of violent physical passions.[2] "But he, his mind filled with Christ, quenched the coal of the devil's deceit." In order to fight his battle against the flesh to the point of a decisive victory he took up his dwelling in one of the tombs which lay at a short distance from the village. Here his conflicts with the powers of evil became more intense. Devils threatened him. They assumed the shapes of beasts to terrify him.[3] On one occasion his friends found him insensible,[4]

[1] *Vit.*, v. [2] *Ibid.*, viii.

[3] "But changes of form for evil are easy for the devil, so in the night they made such a din that the whole of that place seemed to be shaken by an earthquake, and the demons, as if breaking the four walls of the dwelling, seemed to enter through them, coming in the likeness of beasts and creeping things. And the place was on a sudden filled with the forms of lions, bears, leopards, bulls, serpents, asps, scorpions, and wolves, and each of them was moving according to his nature. The lion was roaring, wishing to attack, the bull seemed to toss with its horns, the serpent writhing, but unable to approach, and the wolf as it rushed on was restrained; altogether the noises of the apparitions, with their angry ragings, were dreadful." —*Vit. Ant.*, ix.

[4] "Antony departed to the tombs, and having bid one of his acquaintances to bring him bread at intervals, he entered one of the tombs, and



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and carried him back to the village. The saint was undaunted and unshaken. He determined[1] to penetrate into the wilderness, the very stronghold of Satan. At the age of thirty-five[2]—285 A.D.—he made his way to a mountain in the desert, and took up his abode in a ruined fort. Here he shut himself in,[3] and for twenty years remained without seeing the face of man. During this period his conflicts with the devil were terrible and unceasing. It is impossible for us to realise the life he lived. Trembling pilgrims lingering[4] around his fortress used to hear the noise of voices clamouring and dinning, the threats and imprecations of the fiends, but above these there ever rose the war song of the saint, "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered. Let them also which hate Him flee before

the other having shut the door on him, he remained within alone. And when the enemy could not endure it, but was even fearful that in a short time Antony would fill the desert with the discipline, coming one night with a multitude of demons, he so cut him with stripes that he lay on the ground speechless from the excessive pain. For he affirmed that the torture had been so excessive that no blows inflicted by man could have caused him such torment. But by the providence of God —for the Lord never overlooks them that hope in Him—the next day his acquaintance came bringing him the loaves. And having opened the door and finding him lying on the ground as though dead, he lifted him up and carried him to the church in the village."—*Vit. Ant.*, viii.

[1] *Vit.*, xi. [2] *Ibid.*, x. [3] *Ibid.*, xiv.

[4] "But those of his acquaintance who came, since he did not permit them to enter, often used to spend days and nights outside, and heard as it were crowds within clamouring, dinning, and sending forth piteous voices and crying, 'Go from what is ours. What dost thou even in the desert? Thou canst not abide our attack.'"—*Vit. Ant.*, xiii.

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Him." At the end of twenty years[1] the fame of his conflict had drawn round him so many admirers that his friends set to work to break down the door of his fortress. The saint came out to them. They looked to behold a form emaciated with fasting or wrecked by disease. We might have expected a gibbering maniac, or the dazed face of an apathetic melancholiac. Instead there emerged a man normal in body, simply sane in mind. His admirers gathered round him, and he spoke much to them of the ascetic life. His teaching is given in the form of a long sermon in his biography.[2] I suppose that it was not actually delivered as we read it, but that St. Athanasius worked up the general recollection of the teaching into a single discourse. I do not think, however, that there is any reason to doubt that the sermon, as we have it, is the real teaching of St. Antony. If we compare[3] it with his sayings, recorded elsewhere, we shall not suppose that it is merely an ideal sermon put into the saint's mouth by his biographer. It is occupied chiefly with a description of the various conflicts which ascetics must expect with demons. A clear, strong faith and a confidence in ultimate victory through Christ underlies the whole of what he says.

After living for six or seven years among the

[1] *Vit.*, xiv. [2] *Ibid.*, xvi.–xlii.

[3] For instance, cf. *Vit.*, chap. xxv., with the saint's speech reported by the Abbot Paul in Cass., *Collat.*, ii. 2.

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disciples who had gathered round him,[1] he retired yet further into the wilderness. He feared lest the admiration of so many men might lead him into the sin of pride, and he found that his own spiritual meditation was interfered with by the demands which others made upon his time. Directed by a heavenly voice,[2] he found a new hermitage at the foot of a mountain from which there flowed a stream of water. Here he cultivated a small plot of ground,[3] and lived upon the fruits of it. He rarely left this "inner mountain," as it came to be called, but he gladly received the visitors who came to consult him on spiritual matters. He worked many miracles of healing, and had wonderful visions and revelations, but his spiritual conflicts never ceased.[4] This warrior of Christ found no peace until God gave him everlasting peace. He died at the age of 105 years.

Such was the life of this father of Christian monasticism. Over the whole history of the movement in Egypt his figure towers like a landmark which meets the traveller's eye from every corner of

[1] *Vit.*, xlviii. [2] *Ibid.*, xlix. [3] *Ibid.*, l.

[4] For instance, he was visited by his own sister "grown old in virginity" and other virgins (*Vit. Ant.*, liv.). Many monks came to him for advice (lv.). Many sufferers came to him for his prayers, help, and healing (lvi.). Fronto, an officer of the Court, was cured from a terrible disease through St. Antony's prayers (lvii.). A maiden from Busiris Tripolitana was brought by her parents to St. Antony and healed of a "terrible and very hideous disorder" (lviii.). Polycratia of Laodicea, a Christian maiden who "suffered terribly" and "was altogether weakly of body," was healed through St. Antony's prayers (lvi.), and others.

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the road. All who knew him admired him. Later generations looked back to him as the greatest example of the hermit life.[1] "If all the monks now living," said the abbot of a great monastery,[2] himself a hero of asceticism, "were gathered together, they would not among them make up one Antony." Many monks surpassed him in the austerity of their lives. Some exhibited a statesman-like power of legislation and organisation to which St. Antony could make no claim. His greatness lay in what he was, what he succeeded in becoming, rather than in what he did. To a generation like our own, which believes that influence is the result of talent working upon a crowd, St. Antony's life is an enigma. He possessed an influence which affected the lives of thousands in his own generation and many thousands afterwards, yet he had neither talent nor learning, and he sought not crowds but solitude. Where lay the secret of his power? First of all we recognise his enthusiasm as an element of his greatness. He was one who literally "counted all things as loss for the excellency

[1] St. Antony is referred to by:—(1) Serapion in *Life of Macarius of Egypt* (Coptic). (2) Didymus in *Hist. Laus.*, iv. (3) Didymus in Jerome, Ep. 68. (4) Isidore in *Hist. Laus.*, iii. (5) Stephen the Libyan in *Hist. Laus.*, xxx. (6) Chronius of Nitria in *Hist. Laus.*, xxv. and xxvi. (7) Moses of Scete in Cass., *Conf.*, i. and ii. (8) Ammon in *Ep. ad. Theophilum*, xx. I have taken this list from Dom Cuthbert Butler's *Prolegomena to the Lausiac History*, pp. 220 and ff. It might be added to.

[2] Schnoudi. See his life, translated from Coptic and Arabic by Amélineau, in *Monuments pour servir à l'histoire de l'Égypt chrétienne aux IV^e et V^e siècles*, tom. i., fascic. 1.

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of the knowledge of Christ Jesus."[1] Next we see that he possessed qualities rare in combination with a great enthusiasm. He was courteous and humble. He had a sense of proportion and moderation.[2] He had a wide sympathy with the sinful and the weak.[3] "His manners," we read, "were not rough but graceful and polite, and his speech was seasoned with divine salt, so that no one was envious, but rather all rejoiced over him that visited him." He loved rather to ask questions than to answer them,[4] and was quick to own that he had profited by another's teaching. In his long discourse on the ascetic life,[5] he expressly warns his disciples that excessive fasting may be a snare of the evil one. "There are some," he said,[6] "who wear down their bodies in fasting, yet are far from God because they lack discretion." We read[7] that once a certain brother in the monastery of Elias fell into sin and was expelled. He went to the mountain where St. Antony dwelt. After he had remained some time there, St. Antony sent him back to the congregation from which he had come out. But the brethren seeing him, again expelled him, and again he went to St. Antony, saying, "My father, they will not receive me." The saint sent him back with this message: "A ship was wrecked in the sea and the cargo which it carried was lost. With great

[1] Phil. iii. 8. [2] Cass., *Conf.*, ii. 2. [3] *Vit.*, lxxiii.
[4] *Vit.*, lxviii. [5] *Vit*, xxv.; Cass., *Conf.*, ii. 2.
[6] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 10, 1. [7] *Ibid.*, v. 9, 1.

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labour the empty hull was brought to land. Do you wish to sink the ship which has come to the shore?"

It is not hard to see that a man capable of the enthusiasm which carried St. Antony through the fierceness of his twenty years' solitary conflict with demons, and who yet was gentle and humane, who valued discretion as the soul of all virtue, must have been very great because he was very good. I conceive him as a man whom only the very bad can have hated, whom only the unreal can have feared, from whose society no one, however weak, who wanted to be good need ever have shrunk.

St. Antony, however, does not stand alone as an example of the hermit life. There were others who embraced this way of living quite independently of St. Antony's teaching, like Ammon in the Nitrian desert, and Palæmon in Upper Egypt, the spiritual father of St. Pachomius. There were also St. Antony's own great disciples, St. Macarius the Egyptian, St. Hilarion, and Moses, who, at least during the earlier part of their lives, were solitaries. There must have been many others belonging to the first generation of Egyptian ascetics of whose lives we have no records at all. We know most about St. Antony, and it must be from his life chiefly that we gather our impressions of the spirit which moved these men to renounce the world. It is most necessary to observe that neither in St. Antony's own life nor anywhere else in the records of the

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movement do we get a hint of any inspiration except the love of God and the desire of salvation. Ammon[1] was led to leave his wife and the society of men by the reading of certain passages in the New Testament. St. Hilarion[2] sought out St. Antony because he fervently desired to lead a perfect life. Theodore,[3] the disciple of St. Pachomius, owed his conversion to reading the words, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"[4] Of St. Abraham[5] it is also related that the study of Holy Scripture gave the impulse to his ascetic life. Mar Awgin,[6] the founder of Persian monasticism, was warned by God in a dream to seek for salvation in the monastery of St. Pachomius. These men were not philosophers, dreaming over the speculations of the Neo-Platonists. On the contrary, most of them were comparatively ignorant men, members of the middle or lower classes in Egypt. St. Antony himself was perhaps wealthy, but almost entirely uneducated. Mar Awgin was a pearl-fisher. Macarius the Alexandrian was a seller of vegetables. A third Macarius was a shepherd. Cassian[7] notes it is a singular thing that the Abbot Joseph could speak Greek and knew something of Greek philosophy. These examples will be sufficient to show that these early monks

[1] *Parad. Heracl.*, ii. [2] *Vit. St. Hilarion*, 3.
[3] *Vit. St. Pach.*, xxix. [4] St. Mark viii. 36. [5] *Vit. St. Abr.*, i.
[6] Budge, *Book of the Governors*, Introduction.
[7] *Conf.*, xvi. 1.

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drew no inspiration from philosophic speculation. Neither do I find any suggestion that these men fled in wearied disgust from the burden of life. The Abbot Piamun[1] expressly rebuts such a suggestion. "The men," he says, "who frequented the deserts did so not from faint-heartedness and evil impatience." The Abbot Arsenius[2] is a possible exception to this, but even of him it is only said that he sought a life "quiet from the noise of this world."

It seems to me wholly impossible to suppose, as Weingarten[3] does, that Christian monasticism originated in a desire to imitate the lives of the monks of Serapis. Unless one is prepared to sweep away as unreliable the whole cycle of early Egyptian monastic literature, this suggestion cannot be seriously considered.

The Abbot Paphnutius[4] has carefully analysed the

[1] Cass., *Conf.*, xviii. 6. [2] *Vit. Patr.*, iii. 37.

[3] *Ursprung des Mönchtums* and art. "Mönchtum" in *P. R. E.* (2nd ed.)

[4] The Abbot Paphnutius describes three kinds of callings:—The first, from God—"A calling is from God whenever some inspiration has taken possession of our heart, and even while we are asleep stirs in us a desire for eternal life and salvation, and bids us follow God and cleave to His commandments with life-giving contrition." The second, through man—"When we are stirred up by the example of some of the saints, and their advice, and thus inflamed with the desire of salvation: and by this we never forget that by the grace of the Lord we ourselves were summoned, as we were aroused by the advice and example of the saint to give ourselves up to this aim and calling." The third, from compulsion—"When we have been involved in the riches and pleasures of this life, and temptations suddenly come upon us, and either threaten us with peril of death, or smite us with the loss of our goods, or strike us down with the death of those dear to us, and thus at length, even against our will, we are driven to turn to God, whom we scorned to follow in the days of our wealth."—Cass., *Conf.*, iii. 4.

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various vocations of monks. In no case does he conceive of the impulse being other than a divine leading. I am convinced, by a careful study of the literature, that he is in the main right, and that all modern attempts to account for the movement otherwise must be given up. "Theonas[1] was fired with an uncontrollable desire for the perfection of the gospel." "An old ascetic was once asked,[2] 'What is this which we read—Strait and narrow is the way?' He answered, 'The strait and narrow way is this—that we do violence to our thoughts, and for the sake of God cut off our desires. This is what is written of the apostles, "So we have left all and followed Him."'" "How are we to ascend unto the perfection that is in Christ Jesus?"[3] These are the sort of sayings which we meet everywhere in this literature. These are the kind of questions which the hermits and cœnobites were continually asking each other. They do not breathe the air of Neo-Platonic philosophy. They are not the expressions of world-weariness and disgust of life. They are assuredly not pagan.

Next we must notice carefully the attitude of these men towards the world and towards the Church. Language is occasionally used which seems to justify the accusation of a Manichæan contempt for the ordinary life of married Christians. I am, however,

[1] Cass., *Conf.*, xxi. 8. [2] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 81.
[3] *Ibid.*, v. 1, 81.

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convinced that the movement was not really penetrated by any such spirit. Macarius[1] the Alexandrian was once told by the voice of God that he had not yet attained to the measure of the perfection of two women who lived with their husbands in a neighbouring city. After visiting them and seeing the goodness of their lives, he says, "In truth there is neither virgin nor married, neither monk nor man of the world, but God gives to all the spirit of life." These are not the words of a man whose spirit was Manichæan. The Abbot Serenus told Cassian[2] the story of a certain Paul, whose purity of life was so morbidly strict that he did not suffer, "I will not say a woman's face, but even the clothes of one of that sex to appear in his sight." Once when he was on a journey to visit another abbot he met a woman on the road. "He was so disgusted at meeting her that he dashed back again to his own monastery with greater speed than a man would flee from a lion or a dragon." Here is the true spirit of contempt for God's creation with which the Egyptian monks are so frequently charged. But mark the beautiful and pathetic ending of the story. Paul "was forthwith overtaken by such a punishment that his whole body was struck with paralysis." He was reduced to such a condition that the care of men could no longer minister sufficiently tenderly to his infirmities. His friends carried him to a

[1] *Vit. Patr.*, iii. 97. [2] Cass., *Conf.*, vii. 26.

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convent of women, and there for four years holy virgins waited on him, supplying until his death the needs he could no longer express even by signs. The story shows us clearly enough that the monks who told it were well aware that their spirit was not that which had animated this Paul in the days of his health. A certain brother[1] once boasted in an assembly of his severe fasting, saying that he never ate anything cooked. Theodore arose and rebuked him. "It were far better," he said, "for you to eat flesh in your cell than to make such a boast among the brethren." It is foolishness to continue to charge these monks with being Manichæans in their view of the world, or even with elevating abstinence into an end in itself.

If they fled from the world they did so not because the world was in itself hopelessly and incurably bad, and material things not to be touched without defilement. They aimed at a return to that apostolic Christianity which was itself a separation from the world. Again and again they appeal to the standard of the apostolic life. St. Antony[2] did so. Piamun says that monks are those who maintain the favour of the apostles. They claim[3] not to be inventing a new kind of Christianity, but to be returning to the oldest. Once, to be a Christian involved a separation from the world. "But the early faith[4] cooled down,

[1] *Vit. Patr.*, iii. 54.
[2] *Vit.*, i.
[3] Cass., *Conf.*, xviii. 5; *cf. Inst.*, vii. 17.
[4] *Ibid.*, xviii. 5.

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and even those who were the leaders of the Church relaxed something of their strictness. Men thought that they would suffer no loss if they kept their possessions." Now in the fourth century Christians were of the world. The world's business was done by Christians. The world's pleasures were enjoyed by them. The world's honours were won by them. In the third decade of the century Christian bishops thronged the emperor's court and suggested the emperor's policy. The Christian life had become a world life, purified, indeed, and elevated, but going along the ways the world had always gone, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage. The life of the Egyptian ascetics was an attempt to return to the Christianity of the New Testament. Only the altered condition of the world, which in name had become Christian, necessitated their making a distinct and visible breach with it in order to attain to the apostolic standard. I am the more convinced that the Egyptian asceticism was primitive and apostolic in its view of the world and of religion by the manner in which the early hermits regarded the powers of evil. I have already mentioned the severity of St. Antony's conflicts against demons. He speaks of the air around us being full of them,[1] of their ceaseless efforts to frustrate the labour of the saints.[2] They have bodies, only more subtle than those which men have.[3] They are the same who once inspired the

[1] *Vit.*, xxi. [2] *Ibid.*, xxii. [3] *Ibid.*, xxxi.

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oracles of the Greek gods.[1] This view of the reality and powers of demons runs through the literature of the earlier part of the movement. It is the very same as that which prevailed, as we have seen, in the apostolic Church, but it differs from the general view of the Church in the fourth century. St. Athanasius conceives of the powers of demons differently from St. Antony. He speaks[2] of the air having been cleared of demons by the death of Christ uplifted into the air upon the cross. Our "Saviour Christ," he says,[3] "died not on the earth, but in the air, destroying the devil who was in the air, and consecrating our road up to heaven, and making it free." His view is evidently almost the same as Milton's,[4] except that the latter makes the defeat of the demons the immediate result of the incarnation and not, as St. Athanasius, of the crucifixion. St. Antony holds rather to the primitive belief in the world-wide prevalence of demonic power, although he clings with a kind of defiant faith to the conviction that it cannot prevail against the power of God. "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world."[5] Among the cœnobites of the generation succeeding St. Antony the belief in demons became gradually modified. Then Abbot Serenus,[6] who talked with Cassian at the end of the fourth century, says:

[1] *Vit.*, xxxiii.
[2] *De Incarn.*, xxv.
[3] Ep. xxii.; *cf.* Ep. lx. 7.
[4] *Ode to the Nativity.*
[5] 1 St. John iv. 4.
[6] *Conf.*, vi. 23.

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"We have discovered by our own experience, and by the testimony of the elders, that devils have not now the same power that they had in the earlier days of the anchorites, when as yet there were but few monks dwelling in the desert." He attributes the change to the fact that the steadfast faith of the first anchorites beat back the demons, and broke their power. He also quaintly suggests[1] that the demons may not consider the later generation of monks worthy of such fierce attacks. The very discussion of such a problem shows that the battling against demons had ceased to be a very pressing experience among the monks towards the end of the fourth century, and that they had approximated to the calmer and more rational beliefs on this subject which prevailed in the Church.

It is next very necessary to notice that this retirement from the world involved, at first, a retirement also from the Church. The earliest monks were anchorites, that is to say, solitaries, who lived alone at a distance from their fellow-men. From the very nature of the case we can know but little about the lives which this earliest generation led in their solitude. Tradition preserves for us the name of Paul,[2]

[1] "Our carelessness makes them relax something of their first onslaught, as they scorn to attack us with the same energy with which they raged against those former most admirable soldiers of Christ."—Cass., *Conf.*, vii. 23.

[2] Note St. Jerome's expression with regard to this biography in chap. i. of the *Vit. St. Hil.*, "Paulus meus."

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but his biography, as Jerome wrote it, can be little else than a romance. One beautiful story survives of Palæmon,[1] who refused the luxury of a few drops of oil on his food with tears, saying, "My Lord is crucified, and shall I eat oil?" We know most about those who, like St. Antony, St. Ammon, St. Hilarion, and others, emerged in later life from absolute solitude, or suffered disciples to cluster round their cells. The Abbot John,[2] who had been himself an anchorite, gives a brief suggestion of the emotions which such a life excited. He speaks of "the vastness of the desert silences," of "the seclusion of larger retreats," of "spiritual ecstasy," of "the insatiable desire" which possessed him for "the freedom of the vast wilderness," of "bliss only to be compared to the bliss of angels." We strive, but almost in vain, to project the imagination into such a region. The infinite monotony of sunrise, sun-shining, and sunset, the interminable stretch of vision across grey rock and sand, appall us. There were times when the eyes refused any longer to see, and the ears forgot the emotion of hearing amid the unbroken stillness. The body ceased to press its claims upon the soul. The little row of baskets, full or empty, which stood before the cell, alone served to awaken the recollection that food had been taken or neglected. A growing pile of woven mats marked the passage of the weeks. The ripening of the hermit's patch of

[1] *Vit. St. Pachom.* [2] Cass., *Conf.*, xix.

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corn was all that reminded him that another year was drawing to its close. "The demon that walketh at noonday,"[1] the dreaded accidie, drove the hermit forth to gather more leaves for his plaiting, or on to his knees to repeat aloud psalm after psalm, lest his soul perish in listless apathy. At rare intervals the sight of a figure struggling towards the cell roused the hermit again to a sense of the world outside himself and his God. Eagerly he awaits the visitor. It may prove to be some demon clad for a while in human shape, bent upon his soul's destruction. Or perhaps it is some man of God, who has been led to the remote cell in the hope of receiving a word of life. Sometimes the brief sleep of the hermit was broken by a beating at his door. He rouses himself and listens trembling. There throng on his recollection tales of how the devil himself came thus at night in the shape of some splendid woman, luring God's servant to the point of sin, and then escaped his grasp amid the mocking laughter of evil angels. He takes heart of grace and opens the door, to find, perhaps, some prostrate suppliant in search of miraculous cure, or some enthusiastic aspirant for the glories of the solitary life. More rarely still the hermit himself went upon a journey. He walked through wonderland. Strange beasts met him, threatened, and fled from him. Gold strewed his path sometimes—gold that would buy

[1] See Ps. xc. 6, Septuagint Version.



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him delirious delights in Alexandria. He lay down to sleep in a half-ruined temple, and in the night he could hear the demons of the old carved images holding their revels around him. Sometimes savage animals made friends with him. They came to his cell and shared his food. They bowed their heads for his benediction, and learnt from him the lessons of gentleness which he taught them.[1]

It is altogether a strange life. It is almost in vain that the historical imagination tries to realise it.

[1] The description I have given of the life of a hermit is the result of combining various incidents collected out of Rosweyd's *Vitæ Patrum*. I should like my picture to be compared with one drawn much more artistically by Mr. Lecky, in his *History of European Morals*. "Sometimes, in the very extasy of his devotion, the memory of old scenes would crowd upon his [the hermit's] mind. The shady groves and soft, voluptuous gardens of his native city would arise, and kneeling alone upon the burning sand, he seemed to see around him the fair groups of dancing-girls, on whose warm, undulating limbs and wanton smiles his youthful eyes had too fondly dwelt. Sometimes his temptation sprang from remembered sounds. As his lips were murmuring the psalter his imagination, fired perhaps by the music of some martial psalm, depicted the crowded amphitheatre. The throng and passion and mingled cries of eager thousands were present to his mind, and the fierce joy of the gladiators passed through the tumult of his dream. Most terrible of all were the struggles of young and ardent men, through whose veins the hot blood of passion continually flowed, physically incapable of a life of celibacy, and with all that proneness to hallucination which a southern sun engenders, who were borne on the wave of enthusiasm to the desert life. In the arms of Syrian or African brides, whose soft eyes answered love with love, they might have sunk to rest; but in the lonely wilderness no peace could ever visit their souls."

This description is so much more brilliant than mine that I fear it may prove more convincing to the reader. Nevertheless, my description is the truer of the two. Mr. Lecky has picked his facts, as well as combining them, and his selection is not a fair one.

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One thing, however, seems clear. This complete isolation from the world must have involved also isolation from all that we usually speak of as means of grace. These men joined no gathering of the faithful for common worship, were strengthened by no bishop's weekly exhortation, received no absolution in their penitence, above all could not participate in the sacrament of the altar. Their lives were lived literally alone with God.

Afterwards there came a change, and a close approach was made to the Church's ordinary way of life; but at first the isolation from the Church was well-nigh as complete as from the world.

We must not expect to find very much direct evidence of this in the books of historians who wrote at the very end of the century, when the way of life of the first anchorites survived only as a recollection. Palladius speaks with horror of one Ptolomæus,[1] who made shipwreck of his mind and soul by attempting to live an absolutely isolated life. He recognises that in such a life a man is "separated from the converse of good men, which might be profitable, and from the frequent communion of the mysteries of Christ." I find another instance of the survival of a degraded form of the ancient spirit in Valens,[2] who said to the brethren, "I do not need the communion, for I have seen Christ Himself to-day." A strange story[3] is told of a certain anchorite to whom

[1] *Heracl. Parad*, xv. [2] *Ibid.*, xiii. [3] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 24.

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the devil appeared in the form of an old and venerable abbot. "Behold," said the demon, "I have been thy neighbour for many years, dwelling in a cell from which I never went out until to-day, when I learnt that you were dwelling near me. This I say, brother, that we shall profit nothing sitting in our cells, because we receive not the body and blood of Christ. Let us go to a church where there is a priest, and there receive the sacrament." The hermit yielded to his persuasions and went. His going was the first step in a downward course, which ended in fornication. It is impossible to claim for this story that it is a narration of actual fact. It must, however, reflect the spirit of a very early stage of the movement, since at no time after the first half of the fourth century would it have been possible to invent a story in which the devil tempts a monk to receive the sacrament.

There is another story which I extract from the life of Onuphrius, given by Rosweyd. An aged anchorite is asked by a young monk who has discovered his retreat how in his solitude he has managed to receive the sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord. The anchorite replies that an angel brings it to him every Saturday and Sunday. Amélineau has pronounced this whole life to be nothing but a *conte*. It may be so, but this question and answer seem to me eminently natural. The question must have been asked of the younger

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generation of monks accustomed to their desert churches when they came into chance contact with one of the older anchorites. An answer like that of Onuphrius must have sometimes been given, the anchorite claiming a spiritual communion, the younger man assuming a special miracle. Similar to this is the miracle related by Macarius[1] to Palladius about Mark. "To Mark, the ascetic," he says, "I have never given the oblation, but an angel gave it to him off the altar. I beheld only the fingers of the hand which gave it."

I think that what has been already said is sufficient to illustrate the original attitude of aloofness from the Church which characterised the first stage of the movement. It is not to be supposed that there was any hostility to the Church or any contempt for the Church's means of grace. Simply we must conceive that St. Antony and the others followed a divine call, expecting to find in the way on which God led them all that the Church's ordinances gave to others. There is in the lives of the first anchorites seemingly no thought at all about church or priest or sacrament.

Gradually, however, in Lower Egypt a change came upon the form and the spirit of the ascetic movement. After St. Antony emerged from his first retirement in the ruined fort, disciples began to gather round him. Groups of cells were built round

[1] *Hist. Laus.*, xx.

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the hermitage of St. Ammon in the Nitrian, and round that of St. Macarius in the Scetic desert. The same thing took place in the Nile Delta around Moses, though perhaps at a rather later date. Elsewhere little companies of hermits drew together for the sake of mutual exhortation and comfort. These villages of cells came to be called "lauras."[1] The monks in them lived according to no definite rule. Individuals were free to come and go, and although they submitted to one or another of the brethren for the sake of practising obedience and humility, there was no regularly constituted governor of the communities. Sometimes we catch a glimpse of the germ of a rule in process of formation. Thus it is related of the Abbot Nub and his six companions: "Four hours during the night they used to sleep. Four hours they sang psalms, and four they worked. In the day up to the sixth hour they used to work, then until the ninth hour they read, and after that prepared their food, collecting certain herbs of the ground."[2] Sometimes the dwellers in these lauras[3] had their meals in common. More frequently each man ate alone in his own cell. It was usual for the

[1] "The origin of the word 'laura' is uncertain. By one account it is Ionic; by another it is a contraction of the Greek word for labyrinth, and expressive of the narrow paths or wynds winding in and out among the cells. More probably it is another form of 'labra,' the popular term in Alexandria for an alley or narrow court."—J. Gregory Smith *Christian Monasticism*, p. 38.

[2] *Vit. Pat.*, iii. 199.

[3] Cass., *Conf.*, v. 24.

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monks to visit each other in their cells and to converse together on spiritual things. Sometimes they journeyed to distant lauras for the sake of enjoying the conversation of some renowned father. Very beautiful are some of the stories told of these visits. Silvanus and a disciple of his once came to a certain monastery.[1] The brethren there besought them to eat something before departing. After they had gone away the disciple found a pool of water on their road. He began to drink of it, but Silvanus said to him, "This is a fast day." "But," said the disciple, "have we not already eaten, my father?" To whom Silvanus replied, "That eating was for the sake of love, my son. Now let us keep our fast." There is another story of a visit paid by one elder to another.[2] The host bid his disciples prepare a meal of vegetables and bread. The disciples did so. But the two old men remained until the next day conversing of spiritual things. Then said the host again to his disciple, "Prepare a meal, my son." He replied, "Since yesterday I have done so." Then rising they took their food.

It came to be the custom for the monks of these lauras to congregate at some central cell on Saturdays and Sundays. Even outlying hermits used to come in on these occasions to share the common worship. Necessarily this involved a certain approximation to the Church's way of life. We read

[1] *Vit. Pat.*, iii. 40. [2] *Ibid.*, 56.

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that St. Macarius, the Egyptian,[1] consulted St. Antony about the disadvantage under which the monks laboured, since the sacrifice was not offered among them nor had they opportunity of partaking of the Eucharist. St. Antony's answer is not recorded for us, but after this interview St. Macarius[2] was himself ordained a priest. This was in the year 340. The date marks a stage in the development of Lower Egyptian asceticism, for the example of St. Macarius the Egyptian was followed by his namesake, St. Macarius[3] of Alexandria, and by others. From this time on we read of regular churches in the deserts for the monks. Thus Palladius[4] describes one large church in the Nitrian desert to which the monks (whose number he estimates at five thousand) used to congregate on Saturdays and Sundays. There were eight priests among these monks. There was a church also in the Scetic desert, in which apparently the Communion was administered to the monks every day.

All this is clearly a development from the older life of the anchorites. Isolation is no longer common. The normal life was to a certain extent

[1] "Aliquando Abbatem Antonium convenit Abbas Macarius habitoque ad eum sermone, Scetim reversus est. Obviam ei processerunt patres. Et in colloquio ait illis senex; Abboti Antonio dixi; quod in loco nostro careamus oblatione. Coeperunt patres disserere aliis de rebus nec requisierunt responsum discere a sene, nec senex eis prolocutus est." —St. Macarii, *Opuscula et Apophthegmata*, Io. G. Pritius collegit.

[2] Soz., *H.E.*, iii. 14.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Heracl. Parad.*, ii.

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cœnobitic,[1] and an approach had been made towards the Church. It is important to remember that this development took place during the lifetime and with the approval of St. Antony.

In Upper Egypt monasticism underwent an entirely different development. There also the solitary life was the earliest type. No commanding figure, however, like that of St. Antony stands forth. We know little or nothing of the anchorites of Upper Egypt. Palæmon we hear of, but only accidentally as the master of St. Pachomius. On the other hand, Upper Egypt produced in the monasteries of St. Pachomius an organisation far more perfect than the lauras of the Nitria or Scete. The biography of St. Pachomius represents him as receiving his monastic rule from an angel.[2] It is not wonderful that such a legend should have arisen, for the rule

[1] The word cœnobitic is here inaccurately used. Strictly speaking, the life in lauras was idiorythmic and not cœnobitic. The two types of life are seen to-day side by side in Mount Athos. In a cœnobitic monastery the monks live under a rule and are governed by an abbot. In idiorythmic communities there is no rule and no abbot. The monks, so far as they can be said to be governed at all, are governed by the public opinion of the community. A very interesting account of the two ways of life will be found in Mr. Athelstan Riley's *Mount Athos*, an account of his visit to these monasteries. His description of the idiorythmic communities might, in my opinion, be transferred verbatim to the Egyptian lauras of the latter part of the fourth century. It is not, however, to be supposed that the communities on Mount Athos are a survival of the primitive lauras. They must be regarded rather as an example of the way in which similar ideas tend at different times to produce similar ways of life without either conscious imitation or direct historical connection.

[2] The statement is repeated by Soz., *H.E.*, iii. 14.

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seems to have been, in its main features at least, the work of an individual genius. I have no doubt that St. Pachomius added details from time to time as experience suggested improvements. No doubt, also, the rule as we know it at present contains additions and modifications added by disciples.[1] The main conception, however, was absolutely original. All subsequent monastic rules — the Basilian *Regulae*, Cassian's *Institutes*, the Rule of St. Benedict— depend more or less on the accumulated experiences of those who had previously lived lives in community. When St. Pachomius founded his first monastery at Tabennisi — an island in the Upper Nile—there was no previous experience to look back to. His was the first attempt to regulate an ascetic community. It is therefore startling to find how complete the organisation actually was. The monks[2] were divided into different classes according to the different kind of work they did. A minimum of ascetic practice was enjoined. Individual efforts after severer self-denial were encouraged. The monks met for common worship and for the reception of the Eucharist. Careful arrangements were made for the provision of priests either out of the neighbouring villages or from among the monks themselves for the performance of the divine service.

[1] *Heracl. Parad.*, xix. Soz., as above.

[2] See Zöckler's careful analysis of the rule in *Askese u. Mönchtum*, p. 200 and ff.

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Thus from the very first the Pachomian monasteries stood in close connection with the Church. The monks of Tabennisi are represented as congregating joyfully to welcome a visit from St. Athanasius. At the same time, a certain distrust existed in their minds of the ministrations of priests who had not to some extent at least accepted the ascetic ideal. Perhaps the way in which these monks regarded the clergy may best be illustrated by a story. Schnoudi[1] was brought up from boyhood in the monastery ruled over by his uncle, Bgoul. He ultimately became its abbot. Many very wonderful stories are related about him by his disciple and biographer Visa. We read that one day he was sitting in his cell engaged in conversation with the Lord Jesus Christ. Such visits from the Saviour were common incidents in this man's life. While he was thus engaged, a bishop came to the door of the monastery and requested to see the abbot, in order to receive his blessing. Schnoudi sent a message to him to say that he could not come to him, being engaged. The bishop, irritated at the monk's want of respect, sent a message threatening to excommunicate Schnoudi unless he came forth at once. The abbot smiled. "I am sitting here," he said, "with my Lord. What would the excommunication mean to me?" But the Lord said to him, "Go, lest I be compelled to cast

[1] See Amélineau's trans. referred to above. This story is found in both the Coptic and Arabic versions of the *Vita*.

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thee out of heaven. For have I not promised that whatever they shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven?" Then Schnoudi ran in haste to the bishop, and kneeling before him, besought his pardon. Afterwards the bishop knelt while Schnoudi blessed him.

The story has reached us lit by the dramatic instinct of the wonder-loving Coptic narrator. Nevertheless there is in it an expression of a great experience, an experience common, no doubt, to all who have possessed an original genius for religion. Here is a soul fully conscious of direct personal intercourse with Jesus beset by the insistent claims of an ecclesiastical duty and obedience. The history of the Church furnishes us with example after example of the same situation. Unfortunately very often the issue has been a sad one—schism with its resulting bitterness—a great loss to the Church, and narrow-heartedness for the schismatic. The Coptic story ends happily, and its ending represents the actual facts of history. In the two final tableaux we see the true relation of the ascetic to the Church. The monk is on his knees before the earthly representative of the Lord, in whose presence he dwells. The monk is giving his benediction to the chief official of the earthly Church.

There is another story which also illustrates the relation of the monks to the Church. In the form

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in which I tell it, it is to be found among Amélineau's[1] *Contes et Romans de l'Egypt Chrétienne*, but it is also to be found in a shorter form among the "Apophthegmata Patrum" in Rosweyd.[2] A certain priest was in the habit of ministering to an anchorite. Once it was told the anchorite that this priest was a sinner. The next day he shut the door of his cell, and refused to admit the priest. That night there came a dream to the anchorite. He stood in a beautiful garden in which were growing all kinds of trees and flowers. At the end of the garden was the engine by which water for irrigation was drawn from the river. The wheels of the engine and all its water-vessels were of gold. "Then, as I looked," says the anchorite, "I felt a great desire to drink of the water. But I saw that the man who tended the engine was a loathsome leper. Then I no more desired to drink." To him then came a voice which bid him look upon the flowers and trees. "Does the sickness of the man you have seen injure the flowers and trees which he waters?" asked the voice, and added, "Thus it is also with the priest that offers. If he is a sinner it does not diminish anything from the honour due to the Body of the Saviour, for the divine virtue is always active in

[1] Vol. ii. p. 74. This is a most interesting book, and the Introduction valuable to the student of Egyptian monasticism.

[2] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 9, 11.

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the Sacrament." The anchorite woke, and slept again and dreamed. In his dream he went down from his cell and begged the pardon of the priest. "My father," said the priest to him, "have you entered the garden and seen the engine wrought with gold, and the miserable gardener, and the misfortune which has overwhelmed him?" Then taking him by the hand, the priest led him again into the garden, and he saw, as before, the fruit trees and the flowers, and the man at the engine, but, lo! he was healed. Then said the priest, "His disease is cured, for the forty years of your renunciation have been accepted for his healing." "Then," says the anchorite, "I awoke, and there was no garden, but I found the priest lying at the door of my cell."

This story has neither name nor date. We can only say of it that in its older form it came from Lower Egypt, and was told first some time during the fourth or earlier half of the fifth century. It represents historical fact only as a myth does, that is to say, it reproduces the spirit of a certain time under a form calculated to engage the popular attention. For our purpose we may regard the story as true in the sense in which Bunyan's allegory is true. It meant something to the man who told it first, and to those who for centuries continued to tell it and enlarge it. If the vision never literally came to any monk, yet the experience must have belonged not to

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one, but to many in the Egyptian deserts. Does not the story represent what is still, though seldom so vividly, a real human experience? We see the intolerant dread of all that threatens pollution. We see the way of God, who gives His gifts most mysteriously. These two elements are common in all history of religious life. What is not common is the conclusion of the story, yet this is in strict accordance with what actually took place.

If the idea of early Egyptian monasticism, which I have tried to express, be the true one, then we must conceive of these monks as men to whom inward spirituality was everything. They lived their lives for the sake of direct personal intercourse with God. For this they were prepared to sacrifice not only the pleasures and ambitions which for most men constitute the good of life, but even the consolations and comforts which the Church offers to her children. Because the Church in her progress towards the conquest of the world had herself put on the garments of the world, these men stood apart from her. All experience goes to show us the danger of such an attitude. It is very easily conceivable that Egyptian monasticism might have ended in a schism like that in England of the Quakers in the seventeenth century, or of the Methodists in the eighteenth. It cannot but be of interest to indicate briefly the causes which worked for the close union which came to exist in Egypt between the bishops and the monks.

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First in importance I would place the personalities of the two men who headed respectively the monks and the Church. I have already described the character of St. Antony.[1] It is sufficient to add that he was too great and too good a man to be a schismatic. His influence with the monks up to the date of his death, in 356, was very great. No monk afterwards, not even St. Benedict or Odo of Clugny, ever occupied such a position as he did. Throughout the whole cycle of the literature of the movement St. Antony's sayings and doings are repeated and quoted as final authorities on any topic. He is consulted in every difficulty. St. Antony's life covers the period of development. He set the great example of the solitary life. He lived till his disciple St. Macarius ministered as a priest to congregations of monks in a church in the Scetic desert.

On the other side, the Church side, during the whole critical period St. Athanasius exercised a ruling influence. His praise is in all the churches. At him even Gibbon dare not sneer. We know that he was too great a man to harbour jealousy, too good a man to fail in sympathy for any truly spiritual ideal.

Next among the causes which worked for peace I would place the ascetic's insistence on the virtue

[1] Newman, in his *Church of the Fathers*, has two essays on St. Antony, in which his character is discussed.

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of obedience. It was, indeed, only the obedience of the disciple to his master, of the young monk to his spiritual father, which they taught. I find no trace at first of the idea of the submission of the individual to the Church. Still, where obedience of any sort is recognised as a virtue, separation from the Church becomes unlikely. No later monastic system has ever enforced obedience more strongly than the Egyptian fathers did. Commands, however absurd,[1] however criminal even, were to be obeyed literally and at once. "Obedience,"[2] says one, "is the mother of all the virtues. Obedience is that which openeth heaven and raiseth man from the earth. Obedience dwelleth with the angels. Obedience is the food of all the saints. By her they are nourished. Through her they come to perfection." Men who learn thus to trample upon

[1] For instance (in Cass., *Inst.*, iv. 24), we read how the Abbot John —afterwards celebrated as John of Lycopolis—was bidden to plant and water a dry, mouldy stick. This he did for a long time, summer and winter, although he had to fetch water from a well two miles distant. A similar story is told in Sulpic. Severus' *Dialogues* (i. 13). The same John laboured manfully at the obviously impossible task of pushing a great boulder from its place simply because he was bidden to do so. He received the gift of prophecy as a reward for his obedience. Another monk started forth to throw his son into a river at the command of his abbot (*ibid.*, 27). A pretty story is told of Mark, the disciple of Silvanus. He was writing in his cell when his master called him. He obeyed so promptly that he left unfinished the letter he was in the act of forming (*Vit. Patr.*, iii. 143).

[2] *Vit. Pat.*, V. iv. 19.



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individual volition are not being trained to assert themselves against the Church.

Thirdly, notice must be taken of the circumstances of the Egyptian Church during the episcopate of St. Athanasius. The monks, as I conceive their spirit, retired from a Church that had become worldly. They distrusted a Church whose bishops stood beside the Emperor's throne, whose members found Christianity compatible with the world's favour. Now the Arian reaction against the Nicene formula was engineered by Eusebius of Nicomedia and his party from the Court of the Emperor. It is no contradiction of this to say that Constantine himself remained a supporter of the Nicene Creed. The reaction was craftily worked. It did not at first take the form of a protest against the creed, but rather of a series of personal attacks upon its framers and chief supporters. The Eusebian party were not, strictly speaking, a religious party at all. Their strength lay in politics and intrigue. They did not hesitate to make use of a mob of Jews, heathens, and half heathens, to drive St. Athanasius out of Alexandria. It may be taken for granted that the great bulk of the political converts whom the conversion of Constantine had induced to take the name of Christian would be on the side of Arianism. The Arian position was intelligible to the ordinary educated man; the orthodox creed was not. The Arian

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theology made a lower demand upon the faculty of faith. It may be even that the more clear-sighted saw in Arianism the suicide of Christianity. At all events, it is easy to see which side in the great controversy was likely to command the sympathy of the monks. From the year 335 until 364 the orthodox Egyptian Church was, with intervals of quiet, a persecuted body. The power of the State was used against its bishop. Political and irreligious ecclesiastics were its chief enemies. Pagan and half-pagan mobs desecrated its sacred buildings, insulted dedicated virgins, persecuted the faithful. A Church in such circumstances as these has everything in it to attract, and nothing left to repel the spirit of the monks. Their enthusiasm was sure to be enlisted in so great a struggle. They could not have been enthusiastic for the politics of Eusebius of Nicomedia or for the timid conservativism of Eusebius of Cæsarea. It was for them only possible to range themselves as they did on the side of St. Athanasius and the Nicene orthodoxy.

Thus, partly owing to the personal characters of St. Antony and St. Athanasius, partly owing to the training of the monks in obedience, and partly to the circumstances of the Egyptian Church at the time, the danger of the monastic movement degenerating into a Puritan schism was averted. The ascetic spirit found a home within the circle of the

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Catholic Church. The Church found and recognised an ally which, in ways that were sometimes evil, but mainly good, was destined to support her, reform her, and even to guide her for more than a thousand years.

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# THE LIFE AND IDEAL OF THE EGYPTIAN MONKS

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Lord, I have fasted, I have prayed,
And sackcloth has my girdle been;
To purge my soul I have essayed
With hunger blank and vigil keen.
O God of mercy! why am I
Still haunted by the self I fly?

Sackcloth is a girdle good,
O bind it round thee still;
Fasting, it is angels' food,
And Jesus loved the night-air chill;
Yet think not prayer and fast were given
To make one step 'twixt earth and heaven.

*Lyra Apostolica.*

Tibi nobilius est servire quam regna mundi capessere. Domine quia in nobis non est quod remunereris, sed in te semper est quod largiaris, eripe me a me, et conserva me in te. Impugna quod feci et vindica quod fecisti, tunc ero meus cum fuero tuus. Te autem amare, salvari, formidare gaudere, invenire crevisse, amisisse perire est.

CASSIODORUS.

If there be anything herein which by reason of his condition or the character of his profession, or owing to custom or the common mode of life, seems to the reader either impossible or very difficult, he should measure it not by the limits of his own powers, but by the worth and perfection of the men, whose zeal and purpose he should first consider, as they were truly dead to this worldly life and so hampered by no feelings for their kinsmen according to the flesh and by no ties of worldly occupations. Next let him bear in mind the character of the country in which they dwelt, how they lived in a vast desert and were cut off from intercourse with all their fellow-men, and thus were able to have their minds enlightened, and to contemplate and utter those things which perhaps will seem impossibilities to the uninstructed. But if anyone wants to give a true opinion on this matter, and is anxious to try whether such perfection can be attained, let him first endeavour to make their purpose his own, with the same zeal and the same mode of life, and then in the end he will find that those things which used to seem beyond the powers of men are not only possible, but really delightful. CASSIAN, *Preface to Conferences.*

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## CHAPTER V

# THE LIFE AND IDEAL OF THE EGYPTIAN MONKS

THE life of the Egyptian fathers of monasticism was one of almost unceasing spiritual conflict. The attainment of the righteousness for which they hungered depended upon their conquest of faults and vices which beset them on every side, sometimes forcing, sometimes alluring them into sin. It will be most easily possible for us to realise the meaning and the intensity of these conflicts if we take one by one the chief faults against which the universal experience of the monks warned them to be armed.

Cassian gives a list of eight principal faults,[1] devoting a book of his *Institutes* to the consideration of each of them. The same list is given by the Abbot Serapion[2] in his conference with Cassian, and one almost exactly similar by Evagrius Pontikus. It has been suggested[3] that the list was originally compiled and the faults classified by St. Macarius the Great. There is no evidence to support this hypo-

[1] *Inst.*, v. to xii. [2] *Coll.*, v.

[3] By Zöckler, in *Askese u. Mönchtum*, p. 254.



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thesis, and it seems in itself unlikely, for if St. Macarius had actually made such a list as that given by Cassian and Evagrius, it would most probably have become the standard list of the Lower Egyptian monks, whereas we see from some of the collections of the "Apophthegmata"[1] that other lists of faults and their opposing virtues were made and used.

Cassian's list is as follows:—(1) Gluttony, (2) Fornication, (3) Covetousness, (4) Anger, (5) Dejection, (6) Accidie, (7) Vainglory, (8) Pride.[2]

Gluttony was considered by the monks to be the root of almost every kind of evil. "The six first faults on the list,"[3] says Serapion, "are linked together in a kind of chain, so that any excess in the one gives a starting-point for the next. For from superfluity of gluttony fornification is sure to spring, and from fornication covetousness, and from

[1] Thus we find enumerated in book vii. of the *Vit. Patrum.* :—(1) Gastrimargia, (2) philargyria, (3) avaritia, (4) ira, (5) tristitia, (6) vana gloria, (7) superbia, (8) curiositas, (9) contentio; and a list of virtues in book v. : (1) Quies, (2) compunctio, (3) continentia, (4) nihil possidere, (5) patientia seu fortitudo, (6) discretio, (7) obedientia, (8) humilitas, (9) patientia, (10) charitas, (11) contemplatio. These lists can in no way be made to fit in with or balance that of Cassian.

[2] (1) Gluttony—*γαστριμαργία*—gula or gastrimargia.
(2) Fornication—*πορνεία*—luxuria.
(3) Covetousness—*φιλαργυρία*—avaritia.
(4) Anger—*ὀργή*—ira.
(5) Dejection—*λύπη*—tristitia.
(6) Accidie—*ἀκηδία*—pigritia or acedia.
(7) Vainglory—*κενοδοξία*—vanitas.
(8) Pride—*ὑπερηφανία*—superbia.

[3] Cass., *Coll.*, v. 10.

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covetousness anger, from anger dejection, from dejection accidie." Gluttony is of three kinds. There is the gluttony which leads a monk to break his fast before the proper time, to anticipate the hour of a meal. There is that which leads him to eat to satiety. There is that which renders him dainty and desirous of delicacies. Against all three kinds the remedy is fasting. Some of the language used by the monks about gluttony and some of their fasts strike the modern reader as exaggerated and unreal. There was, however, a genuinely religious feeling at the back of their distrust of fullness of bread, and they are most careful to guard against the supposition that fasting was a virtue in itself or anything else, except a means for the attainment of a spiritual end. "The belly," says Cassian,[1] "when filled with all kinds of food, gives birth to seeds of wantonness; nor can the mind, when choked with the weight of food, keep the guidance and government of the thoughts. For not only is drunkenness with wine wont to intoxicate the mind, but excess in all kinds of food makes it weak and uncertain, and robs it of all its power of clear and pure contemplation." Here we see that the object in view is not simply the conquest of the body, but the avoidance of dangerous desires and the attainment of a position in which spiritual contemplation becomes possible. Fasting was a

[1] *Inst.*, v. 6.

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means to this end, but no more than a means. It is to be regulated by considerations of how best the end may be obtained. Thus: "A reasonable supply of food partaken of daily, with moderation, is better than a severe and long fast at intervals. Excessive fasting has been known not only to undermine the constancy of the mind, but also to weaken the power of prayers through sheer weariness of the body."[1] The value of fasting did not depend upon considerations of its duration, or the actual quantity of food taken, but upon the self-conquest involved in refusing to satisfy the appetite. "One[2] of the fathers was wont to say, 'A man may eat much, and yet be hungry. He keeps himself from actual satisfaction. Another eats but little, and yet is satisfied. He who eats much without being full has a greater reward than he who eats little and is filled.'" Since fasting was regarded simply as a means, it was always the duty of a monk to break his fast for the sake of practising a virtue such as that of charity or hospitality. Thus Cassian tells of a monk who had six times broken his fast in one day because six different strangers had come into his cell.[3] Fasting, in the words of various fathers, "weakens the enemy within," "is the bridle of sin," "conquers the passions." Where it fails of its purpose it is worse than useless. "It[4]

[1] *Inst.*, v. 9. [2] *Vit. Patr.*, iii. 4, 8.
[3] *Inst.*, v. 25. [4] Ruf., *Verb. Sen.*, 134.

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is better to eat flesh and drink wine than to devour a brother's flesh through envy." A beautiful story[1] is told of an interview between St. Epiphanius and St. Hilarion. On the occasion of a visit to St. Epiphanius, St. Hilarion found him eating some fowl. St. Hilarion refused to share the meal. "I have never," he said, "eaten anything that has been killed since I adopted the monastic life." "I," replied St. Epiphanius, "since I became a monk, have never suffered anyone to sleep who had a just cause of offence against me, neither have I ever slept with a grudge on my mind against anyone." "Pardon me," said St. Hilarion, "your plan of life is better than mine."

It would be possible to add to the quotations I have made a large number similar in spirit. Mere repetition, however, is wearisome rather than convincing. Enough has been quoted to show how entirely unfounded is the charge brought against the Egyptian monks of being the slaves of a mechanical theory of virtue and elevating the practice of austerities to the place of a virtue in itself. Their fasting was anything but mechanical. Its place in their scheme of Christian life was clearly indicated. It helped towards virtue, and no more. The spirit of the Egyptian teaching was utterly opposed to violent excesses, in spite of some individual exceptions.

Next in Cassian's list of great faults comes forni-

[1] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 4, 15.

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cation. By fornication the monks meant all sexual relations, and, in strict conformity to our Lord's teaching, all emotion arising from the relation of the sexes. Their ideal was a sexless life, such as that of the angels. The phrases "angelica ordo," "angelica conversatio"[1] are constantly used to describe the virgin life. We recognise that the ideal of virginity is absolutely necessary for the monastic life. As might be expected, the struggle against sexual passion and emotion was a very severe one for many of the Egyptian monks. Their records contain stories of desperate expedients occasionally resorted to which, if they shock the reader, at least demonstrate the sincerity of the monks. Lamentable falls were not infrequent. There are stories of monks who suddenly gave up the struggle and rushed with frantic eagerness into depths of degradation. The torment of evil thoughts was very common. The monk who felt himself unendurably vexed in this way used to consult with older monks to find, in advice, some way of escape. Here are two specimens of the way in which such confessions were received. Cyrus of Alexandria replied to one who consulted him,[2] "If you have no evil thoughts you have no hope, because if you have no evil thoughts you are the slave of evil deeds. He who

[1] These phrases were, so far as I know, first used by Origen. They are, of course, based on our Lord's words in St. Mark xii. 25.

[2] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 5, 5.

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sins in the body has no trouble from evil thoughts." Another[1] brother was vexed with impure thoughts. Rising by night he went to the cell of an old man, who consoled him. This he did many times whenever the vexation came to him. At length, almost in despair at the persistence of the temptation, he said, "Father, of your charity speak some word of comfort to me." The old man replied to him, "Believe me, my son, that if God permitted my thoughts, with which I am tried, to enter into you, you could not bear them, but would flee hence altogether to perdition." When the old man spoke thus the impure thoughts departed from the young man's mind as he contemplated the father's great humility. Sometimes fasting and watching are recommended. "I crucify myself," said one old man, "by ceaseless appetite for food and sleep. Thus I cannot feel the attacks of impurity." Sometimes quite the opposite course is recommended. One monk who had worn himself out with fasting and watching is bidden to rise and eat moderately, that his body may be stronger to resist the attacks of evil.

All the great faults to which the monks felt themselves liable are recognised as the attacks of special demons. This is realised peculiarly vividly in the case of impurity. There are several stories of monks to whom the demon appeared in the form of a beautiful woman. The endings of such stories are

[1] *Vit. Patr.*, xiii.

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sometimes highly dramatic.[1] A monk yields to such seduction, and in a moment the form he tried to grasp vanishes amid shrieks of diabolic mirth.

Desperately severe as these contests sometimes were, it would be very easy to exaggerate their importance in the lives of the monks. Historians have sometimes written as if the whole Egyptian monastic life was a continued struggle against sex passion. It was nothing of the sort. The literature of this monasticism, taken as a whole, is less tinged with sexuality than the novels we read to-day. There is a far smaller proportion of stories in which sex is the leading *motif* than among the *contes*, which were laughed at among the French and Italian nobility of the Renaissance. In spite of the suggestions of Weingarten[2] to the contrary, the literature which comprises the lives and sayings of these monks is pure in its treatment of difficult topics, and singularly free from any exaggeration of their importance.

Next on Cassian's list comes avarice. As the monks conceived it, avarice was a vice very difficult to conquer and eradicate. Poverty was its remedy, but it was recognised that avarice did not consist in the possession of goods, nor true poverty in being without them. Avarice is the desire to possess. A man might own literally nothing, and yet if he

[1] *Hist. Laus.*, xliv.

[2] *Ursprung des Mönchtums*, pp. 4, 5.

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wished to get something he fell into the sin of avarice. The first step towards the conquest of avarice was the complete renunciation of all property. There is a story of a young man who came to St. Antony desiring to become a monk, and yet clinging to some small portion of his property.[1] St. Antony bid him go to the nearest village, buy some meat, and bind it to his naked body. He obeyed, and after a while returned to the saint, showing his limbs bitten by dogs and torn by the beaks of birds. St. Antony said to him, "Those who renounce the world, yet desire to keep possessions, are thus torn by the demons who fight against them." Even, however, when the original act of renunciation was as complete as possible, the demon of avarice attacked men's souls in most insidious ways. Sometimes the dread of old age or sickness tempted a monk to hoard up some portion of the scanty profits of his labour. There was a certain monk who was accustomed to give to the poor all that remained of his earnings after he had bought the food necessary for his support.[2] One day the devil suggested to him that he should save something against the time when he should be old or sick. Yielding to the suggestion, he collected a quantity of money. It happened that after a while he fell ill, and his foot was threatened with mortification. He spent all his savings in paying doctors, but was made no better by their

[1] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 6, 1. [2] *Ibid.*, v. 6, 21.

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treatment. He prayed to God: "Be mindful, O Lord, of the work which once I did, and the money which once I gave to the poor." An angel came to him and reproached him. "Where now is the money you saved? Where now is the hope which led you to save it?" And the monk said, "I have sinned. Pardon me." Then the angel touched his foot, and it was healed.

Monks were taught to make their renunciation of property as complete as possible. There was a certain monk who kept several books in the window of his cell.[1] The Abbot Serapion rebuked him in these words: "I have nothing to say to you, since you keep what belongs to the widow and the orphan and flaunt it in the window of your cell." Another[2] monk possessed only a single copy of the gospels. After a while he sold even this, and gave the price away. "I have sold," he said, "the very book which bid me sell all that I had."

Sometimes the monks reached a pitch of renunciation which reminds us of the words of the Lord: "If any man take from thee thy cloak, let him take thy coat also." For instance,[3] St. Macarius once returned to his cell to find that a robber was rifling it of its scanty furniture. Pretending to be a stranger, he harnessed the robber's horse for him and led it out. Then he patiently said, "We brought nothing into this world. The Lord hath given, and the Lord

[1] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 6, 12. [2] Ruf., 70. [3] *Ibid.*, 73.

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hath taken away. As it seemed good to Him, so hath He done. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Another[1] monk was once robbed of his little store of food by one of the brethren. He suffered greatly from the privation, but he consoled himself by thinking that no doubt the stolen bread was necessary to the life of the brother who took it. After a while his strength altogether failed him, and he lay dying. The brethren gathered round him to say farewell. Seeing the brother who had robbed him, he called him over, took his hands and kissed them. "I kiss the hands of this brother," he said, "because through him I am going, as I think, to the Kingdom of Heaven."

Some of the admonitions of the fathers on the subject of avarice are very well worthy of notice. The Abbot Agathon[2] used to say, "Own nothing which it would grieve you to give to another—nothing which would lead you to transgress the commandment of the Lord, 'Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow turn not thou away.'" A certain father[3] being asked by a brother what he should do to be saved, replied by stripping himself and stretching out his hands in the form of a cross. "Thus," he said, "ought a monk to be naked of all that belongs to this world, and to crucify himself against the temptations and struggles of the world."

[1] Ruf., 74. [2] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 2, 4. [3] *Verb. Sen.*, v. 6, 16.



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Poverty, like virginity, is absolutely essential for a monastic life. Fasting may be more or less severe, according to circumstances. Virginity and poverty must be absolute. Wives and children and property are the things which bind men to the world. The renunciation of these is the price which the monk pays for his freedom from all earthly ties. Just as in the case of their virginity the monks set before themselves the example of the life of the angels, so with regard to their poverty they found a model in the lives of the apostles and the early Church at Jerusalem. They conceived themselves to be following the footsteps of the first Christians when they gave up all earthly property. Two scriptural examples afforded an awful warning to the monk who shrank back from his vocation. Judas through covetousness incurred perpetual infamy and died an ignominious death. Ananias and Sapphira feared to make the gift of their property complete. Judas typified for the monks the avarice which desires to acquire, Ananias and Sapphira that which seeks to retain, property. One other catastrophe is quoted from Scripture as a warning — that of Gehazi. Through covetousness he not only incurred the punishment of leprosy, but, and this is a noticeable point in the monastic conception of his punishment, he lost the chance of becoming a prophet and inheriting the spirit of Elisha.

So far the lists of the eight principal faults given

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by Cassian and Evagrius are identical. The fourth fault on Cassian's list is anger, and the fifth dejection. Evagrius reverses the order of these two, putting dejection fourth and anger fifth. I keep to the order of Cassian, as being the more logical of the two.[1]

Anger is not, like the other faults which have been treated, specially a danger to the monk or the ascetic. It is not even a sin peculiar to the Christian system of morality. The peculiarity of the monastic conception of this fault is that the possibility of righteous anger is denied. A monk has no right to be angry, even with the sinfulness of a brother. To attempt to cure another man's sin by displaying indignation against it is the same thing as for a physician to inoculate himself with a dangerous fever in order to cure some light distemper in a patient. St. Paul's saying, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath," receives a mystical interpretation,[2] in accordance with the monastic idea of the sinfulness of all anger. "The sun" is the "Sun of Righteousness"—that is, the Lord. He shines upon the life of the monk, and all is well. So soon, however, as the spirit of anger enters the heart of a monk, the sun of righteousness goes down for him, and his life is in darkness. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" is therefore an absolute prohibition of all anger, with a penalty attached to it.

[1] Logical, because, as Cassian truly remarks, dejection is one of the consequences of a fit of anger. [2] *Inst.*, viii. 10.

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Retirement from the society of men is no safeguard against anger. "It is not enough not to be angry with *men*. For when living in solitude a feeling may creep over us against our pen because it is too large or too small, against our pen-knife when it cuts badly or with a blunt edge what we want cut, or against a flint if by chance when we are rather late and hurrying a spark of fire flashes out, so that we cannot get rid of our perturbation of mind except by cursing the senseless matter or at least the devil."[1] Thus there was once a monk[2] who, while he dwelt with others, was continually vexed with a spirit of anger. Determined to cure himself, he said, "I shall go into the desert, where I shall have no one to quarrel with, so perhaps this passion will cease to trouble me." He departed and dwelt alone in a cave. One day, after he had filled his pitcher and placed it on the ground before his cell, it was suddenly upset and the water spilled. Three times he filled it, and three times it was upset. Then, losing his temper, he seized the pitcher and broke it. When he came to himself, and realised how he had been tricked by the demon of anger, he said, "Lo, I am here alone, and yet I have been conquered by anger. I shall return to my monastery, where I shall have every need of patience, and therewith the grace of God to help me."

[1] *Inst.*, viii. 19.
[2] *Vit. Patr.*, iii. 98. Ruf., 98.

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Like the other sins, anger is the work of a special demon. Sometimes his personality is very vividly conceived. There were two brothers who dwelt together.[1] A malignant demon planned to cause them to quarrel. One evening, as usual, the younger brother lighted the candle and put it on the candlestick. The demon overturned and extinguished it. Then, entering into the heart of the elder brother, he excited him to such a frenzy of wrath that he fell to beating the younger furiously. He fell upon the earth and besought for pardon. "Have mercy on me, my lord, and I will again light the candle." Then, because he made no fierce reply, the malignant demon was filled with confusion and departed from them. That night he confessed his failure to the chief of the demons in these words: "Because of the humility of the monk who lay prostrate upon the earth and begged his brother's pardon, I was unable to prevail against them. God beheld his humility and poured His grace upon him. Thus it is I who am twisted and tortured, for I have failed to separate them from each other."

The opposite of anger is patience. The ideal is set forth in the words of the Lord, "If a man smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also." The monks tried literally to fulfil the command. There[2] were two philosophers who wished to try the

[1] *Vit. Patr.*, iii. 18. [2] *Ibid.*, v. 16, 17.

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patience of a monk. They called to him roughly, "Come hither, thou wicked old man." He came to them running. They began to strike him on the face. At once he turned to them the "other cheek." John[1] the Short was sitting one day in front of the church, with the brethren gathered round him. A certain brother, filled with envy, said, "Your pitcher, Father John, is full of poison." To him the Abbot John replied, "Father, you speak the truth. You say such things of me when you see only what is without. How much worse things would you say if you could behold what is within me, the thoughts of my heart." A certain[2] brother once came to the Abbot Sisois, and said to him, "I have been injured by one of the brethren, and I wish to be avenged on him." To whom the old man said, "Wish it not, my son. Leave vengeance to God." But he said, "I cannot rest till I have avenged myself." Then said the old man, "Let us pray," and rising up, he prayed, "O God, we have no need that Thou shouldest take thought for us at all, since we are well able to avenge ourselves." Hearing this prayer the brother fell to the ground and said, "I am no longer angry with him who injured me. I beseech you pardon me."

"Of dejection," says the Abbot Serapion,[3] "there are two kinds; one, that which springs up when

[1] Ruf., 92. This is a different man from John of Lycopolis, whose obedience is referred to above.

[2] *Ibid.*, 77. [3] Cass., *Coll.*, v. 11.

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anger has died down, or is the result of some loss which we have incurred or some purpose which has been hindered or interfered with; the other, that which comes from unreasonable anxiety of mind or from despair." The first kind manifests itself in continual irritability and gloom. The monk who has fallen into this fault cannot receive the visits of the brethren without irritation, nor will he speak with civility even to his friends. No matter what subject of conversation is started, it seems ill suited to his mood. He lacks all insight into divine things in his hours of contemplation. He finds no gladness in prayer. This dejection is the "sorrow of this world" spoken of by St. Paul, and it "worketh death." The opposite of this dejection is joyful thankfulness. There were two brethren once who fell into sin, but afterwards repented.[1] The elders shut them into a cell for a whole year, and fed them with a measured portion of bread and water. At the end of the year they came out. One looked pale and sad, the other robust and cheerful. The elders were astonished, and asked the first, "What thoughts had you in your cell?" He replied, "I thought of the evil I had done and the punishment which I had to endure. So from fear my bones cleave to my flesh." Then they asked the other, "What thoughts had you?" He said, "I used to give God thanks for rescuing me from the iniquity of this world and

[1] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 34.

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from future punishment, He has brought me back again to the angelic life. Therefore, remembering Him, I am filled with joy."

The other kind of dejection is far more terrible and deadly. It is despair like that of Cain or of Judas. It follows grievous sins. The poor monk believes that he has sinned beyond the possibility of repentance, and his life ends in some awful moral tragedy. The cruel severity which suggests such despair to the sinner's mind is treated by the wiser and greater fathers with terrible punishments. There are stories of fallen monks driven on to suicide, or worse, by the heartless condemnation of some older brother, who were rescued at the last moment by a wise tenderness which gave them hope. Sometimes these stories end in utter gloom. There was a monk who fell.[1] He passed days and nights in lamentation. Finally he despaired altogether of his own salvation. He returned to the world and was lost. Sometimes the struggle against the demon of dejection is terribly severe, even when it ends in victory. There was a monk who, before his conversion, had led a very wicked life.[2] He went, like St. Antony, to dwell in a tomb. After he had been there for a week demons of despair assailed him. "Where," they cried, "is this impudent and wicked man who thinks to escape us? Thou art altogether filled with our evil, and canst not be saved. Come with us and enjoy the

[1] *Hist. Laus.*, xliv. [2] *Ibid.*, xlv.

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pleasures of sin, since in any case thou must come into condemnation." So they taunted him. But when he turned from them with many tears, and would not listen, they caught him, beat him, and left him nearly dead. For three nights they persisted in their attacks. At last, when they could not drive him to despair, they fled away, crying out, "Thou hast conquered; thou hast conquered." "Thus it has happened," says the narrator of the story, "that many who were driven to despair about their souls have, in the end, advanced to good actions."

I have no hesitation in using the word "accidie" as the English equivalent of ἀκηδία. In the first place, there is no other possible translation, and, in the second place, "accidie" is sanctioned in old English by Chaucer, in later times by Bishop Hall,[1] and quite recently by the present Bishop of Oxford,[2] in an essay on the subject of this fault. This essay and the sermon which follows it are deeply interesting and instructive. They go far beyond the limits of Egyptian monasticism in tracing the experiences which religious men have had of this particular

[1] Chaucer, in the *Persone's Tale*, has, "After the sinne of wrath, wol I now speke of the sinne of accidie." Bishop Hall, in his *Sermons* (v. 140), says: "Though the mind be sufficiently convinced of the necessity and profit of a good action, yet for the tediousness annexed to it in a dangerous spiritual acedy, it insensibly slips away from it." Bishop Hall adopts the correct spelling, "acedy." I retain the "accidie" of Chaucer as being more or less familiar through the Bishop of Oxford's essay.

[2] *Spirit of Discipline.*

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fault. It may be that the term accidie came afterwards to enlarge its meaning, or that Dr. Paget has confused accidie with dejection, but the term in his writings means something different from what it did in Cassian's *Institutes*. The text which Dr. Paget takes for his sermon on accidie—"The sorrow of this world worketh death"—is applied by Cassian to dejection and not to accidie.

Accidie is really a kind of dull weariness born of intolerable monotony and the triviality of daily life. It is indeed akin to dejection, but different. It affects the man who yields to it in one of two ways. Either he becomes listless and apathetic and falls asleep, or he grows restless, discontented, and longs for change. The demon of dejection is one that attacks men in the night. Accidie is the demon that wasteth at noonday. The[1] unfortunate monk who falls a victim to this demon rises and wanders through the door of his cell. He looks up and down, in hope that someone is coming to visit him. He gazes at the sun and wonders that it is so slow about its daily journey to the west. He lies down and sleeps awhile. Rises and thinks with disgust of the work that ought to be done around his cell. He makes his way to the cell of some neighbour and enters into

[1] For this description of the monk suffering from accidie, I have gathered various details from Cassian and the "Apophthegmata." It is unnecessary to refer in detail to the exact sources of each part of the description.

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discursive talk with him. Soon he wearies of this. He decides in his own mind that the conversation of the brethren among whom he lives is dull and tiresome. In other communities the brethren, he feels sure, are more spiritual and their talk more profitable. He returns to his own cell to find his water-jar is empty. It is a mile or more to the well, and the day is still hot. He decides to leave a neighbourhood where the bare necessaries of life are so hard to come by. He sleeps awhile again. Then a spasm of mental activity sets him thinking how great and good a man he might be somewhere else. He feels sure that he is capable of teaching the ignorant, but where he lives there seems to be no one worth teaching. He would like some great monastery to rule. How well he would rule it! Some great deed to do. How boldly he would do it! He would be a different man, much better and greater, if only he were placed in some other surroundings, were anywhere else but where he is. He sets out from his cell to visit some sick man, goes quite a long journey to do so. When he returns things are no better, but rather worse. The contemplation of the monotonous stretch of days that lies before him becomes simply an intolerable obsession.

This is the disease or sin of accidie as Cassian described it. No less than gluttony or anger, it is utterly subversive of the spiritual life.

It meets us at the very beginning of the monastic

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life in Egypt. Even St. Antony[1] had to fight against it. "St. Antony was one day seated in the desert. His mind was full of weariness and wandering thoughts. He said, 'Lord, I wish to be saved, but my thoughts will not let me. What shall I do in this trouble? How shall I be safe?' After a while he rose and went out of his cell. He beheld a certain man, as it had been himself, who sat and worked, then rose from his work and prayed, then again sat and wove a mat, then again rose and prayed. This was an angel of the Lord sent to chide and caution Antony. He heard the angel say to him, 'This do, and you shall be saved.' And he, acting thus, found the salvation which he sought."

The remedy for accidie which naturally suggests itself is change of scene and frequent intercourse with others. The fathers saw that such a remedy was really fatal to the victim of the demon. Again and again they insist that the one hope for the monk is to remain in his cell. The Abbot Arsenius[2] said to a brother who suffered from accidie: "Go back to your cell. Eat if you like. Drink if you like. Sleep if you like. Only do not leave your cell." So Cassian[3] tells the Abbot Moses that having suffered severely from accidie, he found no relief except by running to the cell of the Abbot Paul. But Moses said to him, "You have not freed yourself from it, but rather have given yourself up to it as a subject

[1] Ruf., 105. [2] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 7, 37. [3] *Inst.*, xi. 25.

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and a slave. Make up your mind not to dispel its attacks for the moment by leaving your cell or by the inactivity of sleep, but rather learn to triumph over it by endurance and conflict."

The true remedy for accidie, as St. Antony saw, was work and prayer. Even if the work is useless in itself, like the woven mats of Paul,[1] who lived so far from human habitation that he could not sell them, yet it was necessary for him to labour at making what in the end he had to burn. Else he would surely have been conquered by accidie.

Two sins remain—vainglory and pride. The distinction between them is not very clearly made by monastic writers, but I have no doubt that a very real distinction existed in their minds. It is the desire of vainglory which prompts a man to seek the praise of others. It is pride which makes him feel superior to those around him. Thus sometimes the desire for praise, which is vainglory, may actually arise from a fundamental distrust of oneself, very different from pride. On the other hand, an extremity of pride may safeguard a man from all risk of seeking praise by any kind of ostentation. He may be too proud to care at all for the praise or blame of others. It was against vainglory that St. Thomas à Kempis warned his readers when he wrote "ama nesciri." The opposite of pride, on the other hand, is not obscurity, but humility. However, therefore,

[1] Not of course Jerome's Paul the Hermit.

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these two faults may seem to be confused with each at times, the monastic writers were certainly right in distinguishing them as they did.

Cassian[1] notes about vainglory that it is a more insidious fault than any of those of which he treated previously. Other faults weaken after defeat. Each fresh assault they make is feebler than the last. Vainglory grows stronger and stronger the oftener it is resisted, since every fresh victory over it gives fresh occasion for receiving the praise of men. Vainglory finds a vantage ground for attack even in a monk's virtues. His fasts, his prayers, his patience, even his humility may be the cause of vainglory to him. "Our elders admirably describe the nature of this malady as like that of an onion, and of those bulbs which when stripped of one covering you find to be sheathed in another, and as often as you strip them you find them still protected."[2]

To men who were struggling against the insidious attacks of this sin, anything like boasting seemed particularly odious. Once[3] in one of their settlements the monks were holding a festival, and were eating together in the church. One of them refused to eat with the others, saying to the minister, "I have never eaten anything cooked." Theodore arose and said to him, "It were better for you to-day to be eating flesh in your cell, than that such a speech as yours should be heard among the brethren."

[1] *Inst.*, xi. 2. [2] *Ibid.*, 5. [3] Ruf., iii. 54.

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Very like the "ama nesciri" of the *Imitation of Christ* is this word of the Abbot Mathoen,[1] which he spoke to one of his disciples. "If you dwell long in any place, do not desire to make a name for yourself by being singular in any practice. Do not say, I will not go to the assembly of the brethren or I will not eat this or that, for by such things as these you make for yourself a name." Sometimes the methods which the monks adopted for avoiding the temptation of vainglory seem to us forced and perhaps affected. A story is told of a certain Sisois[2] that he was warned to expect a visit from a judge who happened to be in the neighbourhood of his cell. The monk clad himself in a linen garment, and taking some bread and cheese, sat eating it at the door of his cell. The judge, who no doubt expected to see an emaciated recluse rapt in spiritual contemplation, was full of contempt for him. "Is this," he said, "the anchorite of whom we hear so much?" So despising him, he departed, and Sisois was saved from the temptation of vainglory. The Abbot Nestorus[3] was one day walking in the desert and met a serpent. He fled from it. One of his disciples was surprised at his flight, and asked him, "Do you fear it, my father?" To whom the old man said, "I fear it not, my son, yet if I had not fled from the serpent, I should not have avoided vainglory."

[1] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 8, 11.
[2] *Verb. Sen.*, vii. 11, 8. [3] *Ibid.*, 3.

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Closely connected with the dread of ostentation was the shrinking which the monks felt from ordination. "A monk ought by all means to fly from bishops and women" was a proverb[1] current in the desert of Egypt. We read of a certain monk who so far yielded to the desire of praise that he used to play in his cell at being a priest and celebrating the Eucharist.[2] He was playfully rebuked by one of the brethren who once overheard the performance. He stood at the door of the cell until it was finished and then knocked. The monk came out to him and asked nervously how long he had been there. "I only arrived," replied the listener, "while you were giving the blessing to the catechumens."

Pride is the last and deadliest of all the catalogue of sins. Each other sin has its own special demon. The demon of pride is Satan himself. God Himself is the enemy of pride. It is never said that God resisteth the gluttonous or the covetous, but only that God resisteth the proud.

The opposite of pride is humility, and this virtue the fathers are never weary of praising and admiring. Arsenius, who in the world had been a courtier, was especially noted for his humility. Once,[3] while he was seated in conversation with an unlearned peasant monk, a friend asked him, "Father, how is it that

[1] Cassian calls it "the old maxim of the fathers that is still current" in his *Inst.*, xi. 18.

[2] Cass., *Inst.*, x. 16. [3] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 15, 7.

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you, who know Greek and Latin, are asking this rustic to explain his thoughts to you?" Arsenius replied, "I am indeed learned in Latin and Greek as the world counts learning, but this peasant's alphabet I have not yet been able to learn." This is one of several similar stories told of Arsenius. Once the devil appeared to a certain brother in the form of an angel of light.[1] "I am the archangel Gabriel," he said, "and I am sent unto thee." But the monk answered him, "Surely you were sent to someone else, for I am altogether unworthy of such a visitation." Then immediately the devil departed from him. So this monk was saved by his humility. A certain brother[2] who dwelt in the wilderness believed that he was perfect in virtue. He prayed to God to show him what perfection he lacked. God, willing to humble him, bid him go to a certain leader of monks and do whatever he bid him. This abbot, being warned beforehand by God, bid him take a stick and herd some swine. Some men, who had known him before, saw him feeding the swine, and said, "Behold, this famous solitary has gone mad. Some devil possesses him. He is herding swine." But God, seeing his humility and how patiently he bore the insults of these men, permitted him to return to his own place.

St. Antony[3] spoke this word about humility: "I beheld all the snares which the devil had spread

[1] *Vit. Patr.*, lxviii. [2] *Ibid.*, lii. [3] *Ibid.*, iii.



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across the world, and I said with a groan, 'Who is able to pass safely through them all?' Then I heard a voice which said, 'The humble man.'" Another of the fathers said:[1] "All labour without humility is vain. Humility is the forerunner of love. As John was the forerunner of Jesus, drawing all to Him, so humility draws all to love, that is, to God, for God is love." Again, "Humility neither itself grows angry, nor suffers others to grow angry."

The highest expression of humility is found by the monks in the virtue of discretion. This is the most valuable of all virtues. It is, indeed, a kind of groundwork on which all other virtues are built up. The words in which our collect[2] describes charity would have been applied by the Egyptian monks to discretion. It is the bond of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before God. It may be described from the one side as sanctified common sense, and from the other side as spiritual discernment. It is related of the Abbot John the Short[3] that in his youth he came to a certain brother and said to him, "I wish to be free from care as the angels are, to do no work, but to serve God without ceasing." So saying, he stripped himself of his clothing and departed into the wilderness. After a week he returned to the brother's cell and knocked at the door. The brother,

[1] *Verb. Sen.*, vii., 13, 7.
[2] Coll. for Quinquag.
[3] Ruf., 56.

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before opening it, asked, "Who are you?" and he replied, "I am John." Then said the brother, "Not so; John is an angel, and no longer dwells among men." But he continued knocking, and repeated, "I am he." For a long time the door remained closed. At length the brother opened it and said, "If you are a man, you must work. If you are an angel, why do you come to my cell?" But John repented, and said, "Pardon me, my father, I have sinned." The following story, which has the same *motif*, comes from Palestine. A brother[1] coming to a monastic settlement saw the monks labouring. "Why," said he, "do you labour for the meat that perisheth?" Then the abbot said, "Put this stranger into an empty cell." When the ninth hour came the stranger came to the door of the cell to see if anyone was coming to call him to dinner. When no one came, he said to the abbot, "Do not your monks eat to-day?" The abbot replied, "Truly we have eaten." "Why then," said the stranger, "did you not call me?" The abbot replied, "You are a spiritual man. Surely you have no need of food. We are only carnal. We labour, and therefore must eat. You, like Mary, have chosen the good part. You read all day, and do not need material food."

These two stories explain part of what the monks meant by discretion. It was that kind of common

[1] *Vit. Patr.*, v. 10, 59.

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sense which was capable of appreciating the humorous side of affectation and exaggeration. It was the virtue which saved the man who possessed it from making a fool of himself over his religion. I have already pointed out that St. Antony admired and practised discretion. The greatest of the fathers understood and valued it. It is closely connected with humility, for it is only a man with overweening pride who can unconsciously do things that are exceedingly ridiculous.

Discretion, however, had a higher function than this. It was more than common sense. It was the faculty which the apostle describes[1] as "the discernment of spirits." By it the monks were saved from attempting austerities which would have ended in the destruction of all true spirituality. They were able to realise that Satan came to them sometimes in the form of an angel of light. There is a story of St. Martin of Tours[2] for which parallels can easily be found among the experiences of the Egyptian fathers. One day Satan came to him as he was seated in his cell. The fiend was surrounded with a purple light, clothed in a royal robe, with a crown of gold and gems encircling his head, his shoes also being inlaid with gold. He presented a quiet countenance and a joyful aspect, so that no such thought as that he was the fiend

[1] 1 St. John iv. 1.
[2] Sulp. Sev., *Vit. St. Mart.*, 24.

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might be entertained. The saint, dazzled by his appearance, at first kept silence. This was broken by the devil, who said, "Acknowledge, oh Martin, who it is that you behold. I am Christ. Being just about to descend upon the earth, I wished first to manifest myself to you." As St. Martin still kept silence, the devil repeated his audacious declaration. "Why do you hesitate to believe, when you see? I am Christ." Then Martin replied as follows: "I will not believe that Christ has come unless He appears with that appearance and form in which He suffered, openly displaying the marks of His wounds upon the cross." On hearing these words the devil vanished.

Here it is the virtue of discretion which saved St. Martin. So also, the Abbot John of Lycopolis[1] once, when utterly exhausted with a prolonged fast, "discreetly" recognised, before it was too late, that it was the devil and not God who was leading him to destroy his bodily health. On the other hand, Heron,[2] through lack of discretion, was ultimately overcome by the devil, in spite of his many fasts, and induced to fling himself down a deep well. Two brethren,[3] who had no discretion, nearly starved to death by undertaking a journey without providing themselves with food for the way. They expected that the Lord would provide for them. Even when He did so in a very wonderful manner

[1] Cass., *Coll.*, i. 21. [2] *Ibid.*, ii. 5. [3] *Ibid.*, ii. 6.

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only one of the two had sufficient sense to save his life.

The Abbot Moses[1] reports the following speech of St. Antony, which will show finally the estimation in which the monks held this particular virtue. A sort of congress of leading monks met once on St. Antony's mountain to discuss perfection. Each gave his opinion. Some made it to consist in zeal for fastings and vigils. Others thought withdrawal from the world was the essential thing, *i.e.* solitude and the secrecy of the hermit's life. Others laid down the duties of charity. When in this fashion they had declared that by means of different virtues a more certain approach to God might be made, and a great deal of time had been spent in discussion, at length St. Antony spoke. "All these things are needful and helpful to those who are thirsting for God and desirous to approach Him. But countless accidents and the experience of many people will not allow us to make the most important gifts consist in them. For often when men are most strict in fasting or in vigils, and nobly withdraw into solitude and aim at depriving themselves of their goods so completely that they do not suffer even a day's allowance of food or a single penny to remain to them, and when they fulfil all the duties of kindness with the utmost devotion, yet still we see them suddenly deceived, so that they do not bring the work they had entered on to a suitable

[1] Cass., *Coll.*, ii. 2, Gibson's translation.

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close, but brought their exalted fervour and praiseworthy life to a terrible end. Nor can any other reason for their falling-off be discovered, except that as they were not sufficiently instructed by their elders, they could not obtain judgment and discretion, which, passing by excess on either side, teaches a monk always to walk along the royal road, and does not suffer him to be puffed up, on the right hand, by virtue, *i.e.* from excess of zeal to transgress the bounds of moderation in foolish presumption, nor allows him to be enamoured of slackness on the other hand. For this is discretion, which in the gospel is termed the '*eye*' and the '*light of the body*,' because it discerns all the thoughts and actions of men, and sees and overlooks all things which should be done. For no one can doubt that when the judgment of our heart goes wrong, and is overwhelmed by the night of ignorance, our thoughts and deeds must be involved in the darkness of still greater sins."

To this speech of St. Antony's it may perhaps be helpful to add the description of the virtue given by his disciple St. Macarius the Great in a homily on Patience and Discretion,[1] where he says that it is the faculty whereby virtue (good) is distinguished from evil and the various wiles of the devil, and specious imaginations are understood in their own nature.

[1] c. 13.

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With these quotations on the last and greatest of the monastic virtues, the coping-stone of their ideal temple of righteousness, I close this attempt to describe their lives and aspirations. The whole spiritual region in which they lived and moved is strange to us. Some of their enemies we have ceased to strive against, or recognise as sins at all. Dejection we attribute to a disordered stomach, accidie to natural temperament. Pride we very often regard as a virtue. Very few have advanced far enough in spiritual thought to require discretion. Nevertheless, a study of how these men thought and felt and struggled in their hunger after God and goodness cannot altogether fail of interest for us, and of such profit, at least, as may come from the feeling that they, with all their strange ways and thoughts, were earnest followers of the same Lord we are seeking to serve.

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# ST. BASIL AND EASTERN MONASTICISM

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But now their naked bodies scorn the cold,
And from their eyes joy looks, and laughs at pain:
The infant wonders how he came so old,
The old man how he came so young again:
Where all are rich, and yet no gold they owe;
And all are kings, and yet no subjects know,
All full, and yet no time on food do they bestow.

GILES FLETCHER.

A spotless child sleeps on the flowering moss—
'Tis well for him; but when a sinful man,
Envying such slumber, may desire to put
His guilt away, shall he return at once
To rest by lying there? Our sires knew well
(Spite of the grave discoveries of their sons)
The fitting course for such; dark cells, dim lamps,
A stone floor one may writhe on like a worm:
No mossy pillow blue with violets.—BROWNING, *Paracelsus.*

Son of sorrow, doom'd by fate
To a lot most desolate,
To joyless youth and childless age,
Last of thy father's lineage,
Blighted being! whence hast thou
That lofty mien and cloudless brow?

Ask'st thou whence that cloudless brow?
Bitter is the cup I trow;
A cup of weary, well-spent years,
A cup of sorrows, fasts, and tears,
That cup whose virtue can impart
Such calmness to the troubled heart.

Last of his father's lineage, he
Many a night on bended knee,
In hunger many a livelong day,
Hath striven to cast his slough away:
Yea, and that long prayer is granted;
Yea, his soul is disenchanted.

. . . . .

Thou by the hand of the Most High
Art sealed for immortality.

L'esprit de la prière et de la solitude
Qui plane sur les monts, les torrents et les bois,
Dans ce qu'aux yeux mortels la terre a de plus rude
Appela de tout temps des âmes de son choix.
"Venez, enfants du ciel, orphelins de la terre!
Il est encore pour vous un asile ici-bas.
Mes trésors sont cachés, ma joie est un mystere;
Le vulgaire l'admire et ne le comprend pas."

LAMARTINE.

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## CHAPTER VI

## ST. BASIL AND EASTERN MONASTICISM

WHEN we understand that the ruling motive of early monasticism was a desire to escape the pollution of the worldly life which was becoming the normal life of Christians, we realise that the centre of interest in monastic history lies in the development of its attitude towards the Church. In Egypt there were present in the early monasteries and lauras all the elements which would naturally result in a schism or a series of schisms. Actual strife, however, between the ascetics and the clergy was averted, and owing chiefly to the peculiar history of the Egyptian Church, the monks became the most devoted and enthusiastic supporters of the Alexandrian patriarch. In the East the relations between the monks and the clergy followed what we must conceive to have been the more natural line of development. There are not wanting signs that the ascetics were distrusted, and, indeed, cordially detested by the ordinary members of the Church. We must not be deceived by the fact that great Church teachers like St. Basil, Theodoret, and



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Epiphanius were sincere admirers of the monastic spirit. The rank and file of the Church thought differently. We get glimpses of the ordinary lay contempt for the monks here and there among the biographies in Theodoret's *Historia Religiosa*, and in several of the epistles of St. Basil. Even a judicial assembly of bishops like that at Gangra cannot altogether disguise its prejudice against the monkish life. No doubt these feelings were, to a large degree, justified. The spirit of competition[1] in austerities which prevailed amongst the monks, and led to the most grotesque excesses, must always have seemed to sensible men, what it seems to most men to-day, ridiculous and contemptible. It was the spirit of the Egyptian ascetics and underlay the whole system of the Pachomian monasteries, but in Egypt it never produced the results that it did in Syria and Mesopotamia. We have stories[2] of forms of self-torture, which are both disgusting and degrading. They culminate in the extraordinary tales we read of the great Stylite, St. Simeon.[3] The monkish historians pit their heroes against each other. What Moschus[4] tells us of the austerities of orthodox monks is balanced by the tales of John of Ephesus

[1] See Dom Cuthbert Butler's short but able study of Syrian monasticism in his Prolegomena to the *Laus. Hist.*

[2] *Hist. Relig.*, 10, 15, 23, 28; *Hist. Laus.*, 108.

[3] *Vita* in Rosweyd, pp. 171 and ff.

[4] See Zöckler's interesting description of this competition in *Askese u. Mönchtum*, pp. 275 and ff.

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about the Monophosytes; and Thomas of Marga is not outdone by either when he recounts the performances of his Nestorians. The monks competed against each other individually, and their achievements were boasted of by the adherents of the various parties into which the later Christological controversies rent the Church.

Very commonly, as we gather from St. Jerome's account of Eastern monasticism, this prejudice[1] against the monks found expression in an accusation of schismatic tendencies. St. Jerome himself was accused of schism. He earnestly and successfully rebuts the charge, and declares his loyalty to orthodox bishops.[2] In his case the accusation was entirely unfounded, but it certainly could be made with considerable justice against many other leaders of the ascetics. The solitary life of the hermit tends to develop eccentricities of conduct and a disregard of custom and law. In Egypt the hermit life gradually gave way to the organisation of monasteries and lauras. In the East it continued to be regarded as the highest and most complete form of monasticism. Community life was frequently regarded merely as a period of preparation, through which the novice passed before he ventured to become a hermit. The recognised leader of a band of

[1] Ep. lxxxii.

[2] *Against John of Jerus.*, pp. 42 and ff. (transl. in library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers), and Ep. lxxxii.

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monks who lived in community was often a hermit, who lived a considerable distance away from his disciples. They regarded his mode of life as higher than theirs, and only refrained from entering upon it because they doubted their own powers of endurance. It is only natural, therefore, that in the East eccentricity should be common among the monks. But eccentricity in religion is very nearly related to both heresy and schism. We read, for instance, of a certain old solitary named Abraham,[1] a man of many virtues, and with all an old man's wisdom, who was only with great difficulty persuaded by another hermit to conform to the rules of the Church. Sometimes whole bodies of monks became so eccentric in their conduct that we can very easily understand their being regarded as in reality schismatics. For instance, the Boskoi,[2] or shepherds, a Mesopotamian group of nine monks, refused to eat cooked or even cultivated food, lived without cells or shelter of any kind, wandered about the country singing psalms and praying. They carried sickles with which to cut the grass which formed their only food. Another instance of a monasticism which verged upon schism is afforded by the Remoboth, whom Jerome describes.[3] These are the same as Cassian's Sarabaitae; but whereas they were comparatively rare in Egypt, in Syria and the East generally they were very common—"almost the only

[1] *Hist. Relig.*, iii., *sub fin.* [2] Soz., *H.E.*, vi. 33. [3] Ep. xxii. 35.

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kind of monks," St. Jerome says. These Remoboth submitted to no authority of any kind, either ecclesiastical or monastic. They had no fixed dwelling-places, or settled rules of fasting, or other discipline. They wandered in small groups about the country, and made a living by the sale of their work. It is very easy to realise that such a mode of life exposed them to frequent temptations. Some of them, for instance, traded upon their reputation for sanctity, and sold their goods for such prices as enabled them to become rich. Others, after long periods of severe repression, broke out into almost unbridled sensual indulgence. They studied effect in their dress and demeanour, and earned a cheap reputation for sanctity by sneering at the lives of the clergy. Probably actually schismatic, or at all events very nearly so, were the Valesians who dwelt on the east side of the Jordan, and were especially violent and bitter in their sexual asceticism.

The Audiani[1] are distinctly a sect separated from and in opposition to the Church. Their founder, Audius, was a man renowned throughout Mesopotamia for the blamelessness of his life, the sincerity of his faith, and his zeal for righteousness. Although only a layman, he rebuked the clergy and even the bishops for their worldliness, luxury, and love of money. His attitude gradually became quite intolerable, and he was excommunicated. The strict

[1] Epiph., *Contra Haer.*, 70.

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integrity of his life and his asceticism had won him many friends, both among the laity and the clergy. He found himself the leader of a considerable sect, and was recognised as their bishop. His sect afterwards lapsed into heresy, but Audius himself found a fitting close to a life of strenuous effort after righteousness in martyrdom while engaged in missionary work among the Goths. The Aerians were a somewhat similar sect, who were connected with the followers of Eustathius in Armenia; but probably dogmatic differences had as much to do with their separation from the Church as asceticism. Southern Asia Minor[1] gave birth to the sect of the Euchites, or Prayers—called also in Aramaic the Messalians. They were strictly ascetic in their lives, but pushed their view of life to the extreme of regarding matter and God's creation as inherently and necessarily evil. Theodoret accuses them of having learnt their doctrines from the Manichæans.

The history of these sects is obscure and of very little importance, except in so far as it shows the general tendency of those who accepted the ascetic ideal of life to split off from the Church, and the readiness of the Church to get rid of such reformers of morals. I think that Asia Minor and Syria afford truer types than Egypt of the normal development of the relationship between the early monks and the Church.

[1] Epiph., as above, lxxx.; Theodoret, *H.E.*, iv. 11.

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The further history of the relations of the monks to the Church in the East may best be traced in the northern part of Asia Minor, where the influence of St. Basil the Great was most powerful.

Monasticism was introduced into the regions of Armenia and Cappadocia by Eustathius of Sebaste.[1] This remarkable and interesting man was the son of a Bishop Eulalius.[2] He was educated in Egypt, and was a pupil of the great heresiarch Arius.[3] It is difficult to understand his career and his form of faith. Amid the war of creeds of various shades, which marks the second part of the struggle against Arianism, Eustathius appears to have played a very unworthy part. He signed the creeds of all parties with an apparent indifference to their contents.[4] If he was no pillar of orthodoxy, he was certainly an unsatisfactory ally from the point of view of a sincere Arian. It seems probable that he had no very great interest in the finer shades of dogmatic questions. His Egyptian education had not filled him with an uncompromising enthusiasm for any special form of belief. What he did learn in Egypt

[1] The article on Eustathius of Sebaste, in the third edition of the *P. R. E.*, by Loofs, is worthy of careful study.

[2] Socr., *H.E.*, ii. 43, 1.

[3] St. Basil, Ep. 263.

[4] St. Basil (Ep. 224–9) relates that he signed the creeds put forth at Ancyra (358 A.D.), in which the ὁμοιούσιον was accepted; at Seleucia (359 A.D.), which supported the creed of Antioch (341); at Constantinople (360), which was Acacian; at Lampsacus (364), which was Semiarian; at Nike, in Thrace, which was the creed of Ariminum.



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was a sincere admiration for the ascetic life, and a desire to spread monasticism in Armenia and Cappadocia. Perhaps he was mentally incapable of following out the reasonings of the contending parties who promulgated creeds. Perhaps he was simply indifferent, and desired only to be left in peace to accomplish for monasticism the work on which his heart was set. At all events, however inconsistent his various dogmatic positions may have been, he seems to have steadily aimed at the advancement of monasticism all through his life. Immediately after his return from Egypt he began to practise and teach an ascetic way of life. He excited a great deal of prejudice against himself and his ways. St. Basil, for instance, was warned against associating with him.[1] His father, Eulalius,[2] the bishop, suspended him from some office to which he had been ordained. The reason given is that he dressed in an unsuitable manner. This is surely an insufficient reason for so strong a step as suspension, unless we suppose[3] that his dress was simply the outward sign of something else. In reality he was in all probability suspended for dressing as an ascetic, the open profession of asceticism as a special way of life being regarded as tantamount to schism, and being, moreover, extremely irritating to a clergy who were inclined to easier kinds of Christian life.

[1] St. Basil, Ep. 223. [2] Socr., *H.E.*, ii. 43, 1.

[3] The supposition is born out by Socrates' account of his conduct after the Council of Gangra (*H.E.*, ii. 43, 1).

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We next hear of Eustathius and his asceticism as the subject of discussion at a Council held at Gangra in the year 340.[1] At this time Eustathius had apparently many disciples, and they, if not he himself, had adopted practices which were subversive of all Church discipline and dangerous to common morality. The Council accordingly formulated a series of canons, in which the errors of the Eustathians were exposed and anathematised. It is both interesting and instructive to notice what these errors were. The Eustathians preached against marriage.[2] They induced married women to leave their husbands,[3] enter upon a kind of monastic life, cut their hair short, and adopt male attire.[4] They were especially prejudiced against married priests, whose ministrations they refused to accept.[5] They set up private conventicles, and forsook the churches [6] which were served by married clergy. They taught young people to forsake and despise their parents.[7] They condemned the exercise of Christian hospitality.[8] They ventured to alter the established seasons of fasting,[9] and even fasted upon the Lord's day.[10] All these are notes of a distinctly anti-ecclesiastical asceticism. How far Eustathius[11] himself was implicated in these

[1] For date given see Beveridge: "Habita est. . . . Antiochena A.D. 341. Ergo paulo ante illud tempus praesentem etiam synodum celebratum fuisse non immerito suspicamur.

[2] Gangra, Can. i. [3] Can. xiv. [4] *Ibid.*, xvii.
[5] *Ibid.*, iv. [6] Cans. v. and vi. [7] Can. xvi.
[8] *Ibid.*, xi. [9] *Ibid.*, xix. [10] *Ibid.*, xviii.
[11] See passage referred to above in Socr., *H.E.*

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erroneous practices we do not know. To a large extent they were probably unauthorised exaggerations of his teaching made by a fanatical section of his disciples. It is noticeable that Eustathius himself was not anathematised by the Council. Fifteen or sixteen years afterwards we find him Bishop of Sebaste, so we may conclude either that he had never himself approved of the extravagances of his disciples, or that he had submitted to the decrees of the Council. On the general question of the ascetic life the bishops[1] speak with no very clear or definite voice. They hesitate between recognising asceticism as a higher form of Christian life and regarding it as an amiable eccentricity, permissible, but requiring careful watching and regulation.

If the *Constitutiones Asceticae*, usually bound up with the writings of St. Basil, are, as has been surmised, the work of Eustathius of Sebaste,[2] we are in a position to form a fair estimate of what his ascetic teaching was. He was wanting in sympathy, narrow in his conception of the Christian life, uncharitable and bitter in his estimate of ways which diverged from his own. In a word, his spirit was Puritan rather than Catholic. At the same time, he was sincere, unselfish, and zealous for righteousness.

It was no doubt because of his sincerity and self-denial that he became the friend of St. Basil the

[1] Gangra, Can. xxi.

[2] Garnier in Pref. to Bened. edition; so also Zöckler.

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Great. We know that after leaving the University of Athens, St. Basil travelled in Syria and Egypt,[1] and became acquainted with the manner of life of the monks. He learnt to regard the fascination of expiring Paganism, which captivated the soul of Julian, as a "syren voice,"[2] and to regard the "crucifixions" of the monks as a diviner way than that of Hermes and Aphrodite. It is impossible to describe the condition of St. Basil's mind at this period better than in his own words:[3] "I admired the continence of the monks in living and their endurance in toil. I was amazed at their persistency in prayer, and at their triumphing over sleep; subdued by no natural necessity, ever keeping their soul's purpose high and free, in hunger, in thirst, in cold, in nakedness, they never yielded to the body; they were never willing to waste attention on it; always, as though living in a flesh that was not theirs, they showed in very deed what it is to sojourn for a while in this life and what to have one's citizenship and home in heaven. All this moved my admiration. I called these men's lives blessed, in that they did indeed show that they 'bear about in their body the dying of Jesus.' And I prayed that I, too, so far as in me lay, might imitate them."

With such an ideal before him, St. Basil returned

[1] Epp. 1 and 223. [2] Ep. 1.

[3] Read the whole of Ep. 223, in order to appreciate St. Basil's feelings.

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to Cappadocia. He found that Eustathius and his disciples were already living the wonderful life which he had learnt to admire. He sought the friendship of Eustathius. Many of his friends tried to draw him away from so dangerous a teacher. No doubt it seemed a pity that so brilliant a young man as St. Basil should have his life spoiled by the fanatical ways of the monks. But St. Basil remained firm. He became an eager supporter of the Eustathian ascetics, "because of the extraordinary excellence of their lives."[1] His friendship with Eustathius himself was very close. They spent days and nights together conversing on spiritual things in St. Basil's retreat at Pontus.[2] Eustathius was introduced into St. Basil's family circle.[3] They took journeys together to visit famous bishops.[4] The friendship lasted for twenty-five years, during which St. Basil professed himself satisfied with his friend's orthodoxy and steadily defended him against attacks. Then there came a sudden breach. Into the cause and the rights of the quarrel it is not necessary to enter. We have no opportunity of seeing the matter from the standpoint of Eustathius, and it is impossible to form a fair judgment. The effect of it was to turn all St. Basil's affection into bitterness. He is no longer able to see any good at all in Eustathius. What seemed to be religion he now recognises to be only hypocrisy.[5]

[1] Ep. 223. [2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.*
[5] St. Basil, Epp. 144 and 163.

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Modern historians have universally accepted St. Basil's final estimate of the character of Eustathius as the just one. Yet I think we may well pause before doing so. Is it not quite in accordance with the character of St. Basil to conclude that because his friend deceived him once, or seemed to deceive him, that therefore his friend's whole life must have been a lie? Is it likely that St. Basil could have been deceived for twenty-five years about the character of a man with whom he was very intimate? "I am convinced from the whole character of Eustathius that he cannot be lightly turning from one direction to another; that a man shunning a lie even in any little matter as an awful sin is not likely to run counter to the truth."[1] This is St. Basil's earlier judgment, based upon his personal knowledge of his friend's character. Is it not on the whole likely to be nearer the truth than the later one expressed in the heated invective of theological strife?

It is with a dishonoured name that Eustathius passes down the pages of history. His work is forgotten. His writings are lost or given to St. Basil. It is not he but St. Basil who is recognised as the great patriarch of Greek monasticism. Yet there is no doubt that Eustathius exercised a great influence over St. Basil. A number of ascetic writings have been attributed to St. Basil, some of which are

[1] Ep. 99, written in the year 372.

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certainly not his and others perhaps not entirely his. If Eustathius, as seems likely, was the author of some of these works, then his teaching must have very early been confused with that of St. Basil. The famous hospitium at Cæsarea, where monks ministered to the wants of the indigent and sick, was an imitation of an earlier institution founded by Eustathius at Sebaste.

St. Basil was, however, a far greater man than Eustathius. He grasped the problem[1] with which the early enthusiasm of the monks confronted the Church, and accomplished the task of finding a place for monasticism within the circle of the Church's organisation. The Church in Asia Minor in St. Basil's time was in danger of losing all purely spiritual enthusiasm, and of becoming a mere political organisation, or at best a home for sober and settled morality and piety. St. Basil saved her from fencing off for herself a paddock of religion inspired by nothing more lofty than common sense. He taught her that Christianity, if it is to be true to the ideas of the apostolic Church, must be a religion of enthusiasm and of far-reaching self-denial. The monks, on the other hand, were in danger of rushing into unbridled extravagances. He saved them from becoming a

[1] Dr. A. Kranisch has made a very able study of St. Basil's ascetic teaching in his *Die Ascetik in ihrer dogmatischen Grundlage bei Basilius dem Grossen.*

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conglomerate of sects, at war with each other, and unanimously contemptuous of the Church.

It seems that St. Basil's work ought to have a very real interest for us. The problem of our English Christianity has been for three centuries very nearly the same as that of the Cappadocian Church in the fourth century. Our Church, too, has been confronted with unregulated enthusiasms which could not and would not be satisfied with the common expression of a nation's Christianity. The English Church has been signally successful in fostering the quiet piety of home and family, in blending what is sweet and beautiful in common life with peaceful reverence for Christ. As a national Church she has failed to produce great warrior saints. She has shrunk back timidly from enthusiastic men who threatened to break away from the bounds of sobriety, and has stood fastidiously aloof from the eccentricities which are almost inevitably associated with religious genius. Thus time after time she has suffered earnest men to spend their energies outside her communion. She lost the Quakers in the seventeenth century, the Methodists in the eighteenth, the Plymouth Brethren and Salvation Army in the nineteenth century. These should all have been, not sects outside, but orders within the Church. The fault has been ours and theirs. Ours because we distrusted enthusiasm and dreaded new ways. Theirs

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because they suffered themselves to become contemptuous and bitter. It is the misfortune of the whole nation that we have never had a Basil.

It is, therefore, with something more than merely academic interest that we approach the subject of St. Basil's work for monasticism, and how he performed it.

In the first place, it is misleading to speak of St. Basil as the author of a monastic rule. St. Basil did not compose a rule in the sense in which St. Benedict did. His ascetic writings are treatises, sermons, catechisms, but not rules. The *Regula Fusius Tractatae* and the *Regula Brevius Tractatae*, which, of all his writings, bear the closest resemblance to rules, are really devotional catechisms. They are applicable chiefly to those who have embraced the monastic life, but are also useful in part to those who, under any circumstances, are trying to be followers of Christ. The form in which these two works are cast itself forbids their being considered as, strictly speaking, rules. They are catechisms, series of questions and answers, and not definite laws. There is a spirit running through them difficult to express, but easily felt by a sympathetic reader, which differentiates them from a regular rule like the Benedictine. If no monastery any longer existed, it would be possible, with the rule of St. Benedict as a guide, to reconstruct a society like that of Monte Cassino. It would be impos-

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sible from the writings of St. Basil to create a working organisation where none existed. On the other hand, granted a Christian society of any kind, a sincere effort to appreciate the meaning of St. Basil's ascetic teaching would result certainly in a greatly deepened spirituality, and a sympathy with the ascetic ideal in whatever form it might express itself. St. Benedict is a legislator. St. Basil a spiritual director. St. Benedict aims at the creation of a home, a perfectly suitable environment, for the Christian life. St. Basil strives rather to awaken desire for the evangelic perfection, and to point out the dangers which await the traveller along the narrow way.

There is, therefore, what at first sight strikes us as a certain vagueness and indefiniteness about even St. Basil's *Regula Fusius* and *Regula Brevius Tractatae.* For instance, the thirteenth question of the *Reg. Fus. Tract.* deals with the discipline of silence. Here is a practice suitable, indeed possible, only for those who live monastic lives. Shortly[1] afterwards, in the same treatise, we have a question and answer dealing with the virtue of temperance.[2] St. Basil explains temperance to consist not merely of fasting, watching, and chastity. It includes labour, a limitation of the freedom of the tongue, setting bounds to the ranging of the eyes, and controlling the hearing of the ears. This complete self-conquest is certainly

[1] Interrog. xvi. [2] τὸ ἐγκρατεύεσθαι.

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more easily practised, is more possible, for the monk, but it is not the less an ideal to be striven for by Christians in the world. Again, another question[1] and answer treat of the spirit which ought to animate work. Here his teaching is as completely applicable to the Christian merchant in a great city as to the monk who ploughs a lonely field. Thus all through these two catechisms we have sometimes advice which is applicable only to a monk in his cloister, sometimes a discussion of a virtue attainable best in a monastery, but to be aimed at by all, and sometimes the setting forth of a necessary fundamental principle of all Christian life. And this, which is true even of these two works, which resemble most nearly a regular monastic rule, is much more obvious in St. Basil's other ascetic writings. He refuses to draw a hard-and-fast line between monks and other Christians. He teaches that all Christian life must be ascetic. There is a question of the degree of its asceticism between the life of a monk and that of a married man. There is no question that both lives are lived on the same principle. "God," he says,[2] "has permitted men to live in one of two ways, either as married or as monks. But it must not be supposed that those who are married are therefore free to embrace the world. The evangelic renunciation is their ideal, too, for the Lord's words were spoken

[1] Interrog. xlii.

[2] *De renun. Saecl.*, i, and ii.

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to those who were in the world as well as to the apostles. 'What I say unto you I say unto all.'"

It seems, then, that one great aim of St. Basil's ascetic teaching was to connect the monastic life with that of ordinary Christians, and to place both alike beside the great standard of the evangelic teaching. He spoke to those members of the Church who viewed monasticism and its enthusiasm with dislike and distrust. He showed them that in the deadening of all enthusiasm, in the easy acceptance of the world's standard of life, there lurks a danger as real as the danger of monkish fanaticism. He spoke to the monks, showing them that their way was no new kind of Christian life, no special and exclusive expression of the gospel spirit, but only a faithful following out of common principles. "This," he says, "is the goal of Christianity, the imitation of Christ in the measure of His humanity as far as the vocation of each man permits."[1]

Another great note of St. Basil's ascetic writings is the connection which he establishes between the asceticism, culminating in monasticism, of the Christian life and the great truths of the Christian creed. Monks, up to the time of St. Basil, had lived instinctively great lives, and had held unquestioningly the fundamental doctrines of the creed. St. Basil reasons out a connection between the two. Starting from the belief in God as man's creator,[2] he shows

[1] *Reg. Fus. Tract.*, xliii. [2] *Hexaem.*, i. 2.

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that the renunciation of the monk is really an act of self-dedication to Him to whom already man belongs. "I do nothing," he says,[1] "when I give myself to Thee. I give Thee only what is thine." Starting from the belief in the ultimate judgment[2] of the world, he writes,[3] "Discipline all the lusts of the flesh, and keep the thought of God ever built up in your soul, as in a very holy temple. In every deed and word hold before your eyes the judgment of Christ, so that every individual action may bring you glory in that day of retribution." He speaks of the Christian life as an ascetic warfare, a continual military service against the world and the flesh.[4] It is laid upon humanity as a direct consequence of the fall. Thus asceticism is brought into intimate connection with the doctrines of redemption and of grace.

This, it seems to me, is the most important work which St. Basil accomplished for monasticism. He wrought its ideal into the fabric of the Church's dogmatic thought. He showed it to be the ideal life of a religion which taught as Christianity teaches about God and judgment, grace and fall, sin and redemption. From his time until the Protestant Reformation monasticism occupied the position in which St. Basil placed it. His work never needed

[1] *In Psalm cxv. 5.*
[2] *Proœmium* and *De Judicio.*
[3] Ep. 146.
[4] *E.g.* in *De renun. Saecl.*, ii.

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to be done again. Other minds occupied themselves with the best means of leading the ascetic life, with the limits and possibilities of renunciation. Rules were composed, reformed, improved; but, until the sixteenth century, men on every side were agreed that monasticism was an integral part of the Church's life, the highest expression of the Christian spirit. Unless a man denied the doctrine of the fall, and the double need for God's grace and human co-operation in elevating man from his state of sin, it did not seem possible to conceive of the monastic life as a mighty error, or even a dangerous eccentricity.

Thus St. Basil met the problem which faced the Cappadocian Church in his day. He taught the monks to venerate the Church as the guardian of those truths which gave its meaning and purpose to their life. He taught the Church to honour the monks as men who followed to its practical issues the teaching of the creed.

Of less importance, and yet not altogether to be neglected, are the suggestions which St. Basil makes for the guidance of those who have embraced the monastic life. Their general tendency is in the direction of subordinating the individual to the community. For instance, he decidedly prefers the cœnobitic to the hermit life. The fact of this preference is itself sufficiently remarkable in the East, although in this St. Basil breaks no new

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ground, but follows the example of St. Pachomius. Very much more remarkable are the grounds on which he bases his preference. "In the solitary life," he says,[1] "the gifts we have from God are useless, and the gifts we lack cannot be supplied. There are duties which cannot be performed by the solitary hermit; for example, the visitation of the sick, and generally all the works of charity. How can we be all members of one body, as we are called, unless we are united and joined to one another? How, if we are all separated one from another, can we render due obedience to Him who is the head of the body, even Christ? How can we rejoice with him who rejoices, and weep with him who is in trouble, when no man knows the condition of his neighbour? The Lord Himself, out of the greatness of His benignity, did not rest content with the words of precepts, but expressly gave us an example of humility, for He girded Himself and washed His disciples' feet. Whose feet will you wash? To whom will you be a servant? Compared with whom will you be last of all if you remain a solitary?" These arguments are exceedingly important, not only as establishing the superiority of the cœnobitic life over the solitary, but as a reassertion, in the face of the individualistic tendency of early monasticism, of the great principle of the community of Christians with each other. In other words, they assert

[1] *Reg. Fus. Tract.*, vii. Cf. *Reg. Brev. Tract.*, 74.

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the necessity for a Church. Necessarily in due time the principle which St. Basil here enunciates was pushed to its conclusion, and the monks came to think of themselves as having not only a duty of mutual help, but a communion also with the great Church outside the monastery; a duty to perform to her, gifts and graces to receive from her. This idea was present to St. Basil's own mind when he wrote, "Those to whom there has been much entrusted ought to move those who are weaker to the imitation of their lives, as the apostle, the blessed Paul, says, 'Be ye imitators of me as I am also of Christ.'"

In connection with his preference for the cœnobitic life must be placed St. Basil's insistence on a life of labour for the monks.[1] From the days of St. Antony the monks had been taught to work, but they worked mainly as a remedy against accidie and sloth. St. Basil taught that labour should be in itself useful, and directed to some practical purpose. His monks are to be useful citizens, playing their part in the economy of the State.

The spirit[2] in which he treats fasting is similar. Great fasts are not to be undertaken in a spirit of bravado. The practice is to be kept within such limits as will not injure the bodily health or spiritual activity.

Of the relation of monks to bishops and the

[1] Ep. ii.; *Reg. Fus. Tract.*, 37.
[2] *Reg. Fus. Tract.*, 18–20; *Reg. Brev. Tract.*, 128–33.



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Church clergy in general, St. Basil says nothing directly. He wished, however, to have monasteries placed near cities, partly, no doubt, that the monks might find greater opportunities of influence, but chiefly in order that they might come well within the sphere of episcopal influence.

St. Basil's teaching and ideals affected Eastern monasticism only very gradually. At first the Basilian conception of the life was confined to Cappadocia and the neighbouring regions. Sozomen[1] notes that the Cappadocian monks differed from those of Palestine and Syria in their preference for monasteries in the neighbourhood of cities. He explains that this was owing to the severity of their climate. In reality it was the result of St. Basil's teaching, which had not as yet penetrated beyond the district of his diocese.

The general acceptance of his ideal of monasticism throughout the Greek Church was partly the result of a recognition of its superiority, which led monks to adopt it voluntarily. Partly it was the consequence of direct ecclesiastical and civil legislation.

In the sixth century we read[2] of three men, Euthymius, Sabbas, and Theodosius, who may be

[1] *H.E.*, vi. 34.

[2] Some of what remains of this chapter is based on the opening sections of Ph. Meyer's *Geschichte der Athosklöster*. I have not had opportunity of studying all the authorities he quotes, but I am the more content to follow him, as I observe that his work has been used in the same way by so painstaking and careful a writer as Zöckler (*Askese u. Mönchtum*, pp. 292 and ff.).

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regarded as missionaries of Basilian monasticism among the anchorites of Palestine and Syria. Hitherto, outside of Cappadocia, the hermit life had continued to be not only the highest, but almost the only type of monastic life. Theodosius aimed at the formation of regular monasteries, Euthymius and his disciple Sabbas at gathering the hermits into some kind of lauras. Sabbas, indeed, conceived of communities for those who were well advanced in the ascetic life, but he still retained the idea that the highest and most perfect life was that of the anchorite or Kelliote. Thus he is represented by his biographer as saying to Theodosius, "You, father, are a leader of boys, but I am a leader of leaders, for each of those with me, being independent, is master of his own cell."

The Basilian ideal of monasticism became really influential throughout the East after a process of legislation. Four canons of the Council of Chalcedon are directed against irregular and independent forms of monasticism. It is ordered (Canon 4) that no monastery should be anywhere built or founded without the consent of the bishop of the city; that the monks in each monastery should be subject to the bishop; that they embrace a life of tranquillity, neither troubling nor meddling with ecclesiastical or secular affairs. In Canon 8 the tradition of the holy fathers, by whom I understand St. Basil especially to be meant, is referred to in support of

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the direction that the clergy of almshouses and monasteries are to be subject to the power of the bishops. These clergy were evidently ordained monks. Canon 23 is directed against monks, either lay or clerical, who set at naught the authority of their bishops, and "excite commotions," especially in Constantinople. Canon 24 aims at preserving for their original religious purposes the buildings of monastic communities.

Other councils, such, for instance, as Agde and the Trullian Council, legislated in the same spirit, completing a series of enactments which tended to limit the freedom of the monks and place them more and more in a position of dependence on the bishops.

The same thing was undertaken by the civil power in the Justinian Code. It may even be said that Justinian shared with St. Basil the honour of having given shape to Greek monasticism. St. Basil conceived the idea of a community life in close connection with, and subordination to, the Church. Justinian's legislation realised the idea and led to its being generally practised in the Church. The legislation of the Justinian Code follows closely the canons of Chalcedon in subordinating the monks to the bishops. No monastery is to be founded unless the bishop of the diocese in which it is to be built has given his consent and formally taken it under his protection by the ceremony of Stauropegia.[1] The

[1] *Nov.*, v. 3.

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community life is established as the only recognised form of monasticism. Each monastery is to consist of a sufficient number of buildings to accommodate all the monks. They are to sleep and eat within the walls of the monastery. Only the aged and the sick are to be allowed to dwell apart from the community. Where there are monks who have a vocation for the solitary life (Hesychastae) they are to have their own cells within the monastery, and live in solitude in the midst of their brethren.[1] The number of such solitaries is to be strictly limited.[2] Abbots and priors are to be elected either by the whole body of the monks or by some of the worthiest.[3] The bishops are to have a voice in such elections. The services of the Church are to be performed by some of the older monks who have been ordained.[4] On entering a monastery a monk resigns to the community all his property except in cases where wife or children are left behind in the world. They have a claim upon a share of the renunciant's property.[5] Once a monk is received into a monastery, he is forbidden to return to secular life.[6]

The enactments of the Justinian Code form a legislative expression of the Basilian idea of monasticism. The monks were given a recognised position within or rather beside the Church. It was not

[1] *Nov.*, cxxiii. 36. [2] *Ibid.*, cxxxiii. [3] *Ibid.*, cxxiii. 34.
[4] *Ibid.*, cxxxiii. 2. [5] *Ibid.*, v. 5. [6] *Ibid.*, cxxiii. 32.

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practically different from the position of the Western monks. It was, however, forced upon the monks from outside by the power of Church and State working together. Thus while Greek monasticism was made to conform to the model suggested by the teaching of St. Basil, it was deprived of the opportunity for free and spontaneous development.

At the end of the eighth century, for the first time, Greek monasticism produced for itself a rule which resembles the Western rules, and which had a history comparable to that of the rule of St. Benedict. The Studite monastery in Constantinople occupied during the eighth century a leading position in the East. The Empress Irene appointed Theodore to be its abbot. He set himself to realise, down to the minutest details, the conception of a community life. The organisation which he imposed upon his monks was more complete and detailed even than the Benedictine. In his "Testament" he left a monastic rule which was copied and reproduced everywhere in the Greek Church. It forms the basis of the rule which Athanasius wrote for the monks of Athos. It was introduced by various Eastern bishops into their dioceses. It became the normal rule of Russian monasticism after its introduction by Theodosius into the monastery of Kiew.

If we compare Greek monasticism with that of the West, its history is curiously uninteresting. Three great names stand out before us—those of a bishop,

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St. Basil; an emperor, Justinian; and a monk, Theodore the Studite. St. Basil conceived an ideal: Justinian enforced it from without, Theodore endeavoured to realise it from within. Of these three, St. Basil alone was influential in the development of Western monasticism. He occupies, in reality, the same place in the history of Latin as in that of Greek monasticism. His thought and his ideal lay at the root of both developments. In the West it was worked out into a system by St. Benedict, in the East by Theodore the Studite. So far the histories of Latin and Greek monasticism seem parallel. In reality there is a difference which profoundly affected the ultimate results of the two developments. In the West monasticism worked out its own destiny freely. In the East between St. Basil and Theodore came Justinian. The strong hand of the imperial legislator crushed the vitality of Greek monasticism, even while forcing it into a shape like that which Latin monasticism spontaneously assumed. It is to this fact that we must trace the comparative barrenness of Greek monasticism.

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# THE DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN MONASTICISM UP TO THE TIME OF ST. BENEDICT

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Felices nemorum pangimus incolas,
Certo consilio quos Deus abdidit
Ne contagio secli
Mores laederet integros
Ut te possideant, quem sitiunt Deum,
Urbes, regna, suos, se quoque deserunt.
Totus viluit orbis,
Dum coelestia cogitant.
Nudi, prompti, alacres, liberi ab omnibus,
Ad luctam pugiles ocius advolant;
Ut vastum mare tranent
Prudentes onus exeunt.
Aeternas ut opes, certaque grandia
Securi rapiant, omnia ludicra
Sano pectore temerunt,
Confisi melioribus.
Illis summa fuit gloria, despici;
Illis divitiae, pauperiem pati;
Illis summa voluptas
Longo supplicio mori.

*Paris Breviary.*

Bene seipsum perdit, qui nihilunquam pro se facit: sed omnis ejus intentio et omne desiderium tendit ad Dei placitum.

ST. BERNARD, *Serm. in Nat. St. Benedicti Abb.*

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## CHAPTER VII

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN MONASTICISM UP TO THE TIME OF ST. BENEDICT

NEITHER in Egypt nor in the East did monasticism ever become of very great historical importance. In Egypt the flight of the monks into the desert was an incident in history and nothing more. The life in the Nitria or the Thebaid was very beautiful, is still very interesting, but so far as the history of Egypt is concerned, it was unimportant. So far as we can see, Egypt to-day would be just what it is if St. Antony and his disciples had inhabited the forests of Germany or the plains of Russia. Greek monasticism has hardly been of greater importance for the making of the modern Church or the advancement of modern civilisation. It may well be doubted whether the course of history would have been materially different if no ascetic penitents had settled in Athos or Sinai. Neither Egyptian nor Greek monasticism has been a factor in the making of history, save in so far as they gave the pattern and impulse of their



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life to the monks of the West. Here, however, in Italy, Spain, Gaul, Germany, and the British Isles, the whole history of the Church has been made by monks, and the development of civilisation profoundly affected by them.

What we call the Middle Ages form the period of modern Europe's childhood. Titanic ideas struggled for realisation. Slowly out of their strifes the modern world came to its growth. Monasticism dominated the Middle Ages. The ideal life was monastic. The conception of religion had a monastic character. The very form of the churches reflected the monastic spirit in stone and mortar. All that made for progress up to the dawn of the Renaissance came from the monasteries. Learning survived only within their walls. Education was possible only in their schools. Agriculture was the art of the monks. They cleared the forests, ploughed fields, made barren wastes into fruitful farms. Monasteries were the refuge of the oppressed. In a world where mere force reigned otherwise undisputed, the voices of justice and right might still be heard within their walls. They were the only homes for the studious and the gentle. The abbots mediated in the interests of humanity between warring potentates. They proclaimed here and there a truce of God, which gave men time to breathe and look around. The monks fed the hungry and tended the sick. They gave back, again and again, the

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vital spark of spiritual religion to a Church that from pope to serf had sunk into formalism and vice.

Civilisation was born from the womb of monasticism, and sucked milk from its breasts. Whence, then, came the Western monks? What were their ideals? What was their plan of life? How came it that they were so richly fruitful in good?

In 339 St. Athanasius came to Italy, bringing with him Ammonius, a Nitrian monk. There were monks in Italy before he came, and even associations for ascetic living resembling monasteries,[1] but his visit gave the first great impulse to monastic life in the West. From about the year 350 onwards numerous monasteries and nunneries were founded in Rome, Northern and Southern Italy, in Gaul, and on islands in the western Mediterranean.

The notices of these early foundations are difficult to disentangle from the mass of miscellaneous literature in which they are embedded, and sometimes it is hard to distinguish between accidental associations of religious men or women and what may properly be called monasteries. The list which I subjoin may, however, serve to give some idea of the rapid spread and vitality of the movement.

1. *Rome.*—Pammachius,[2] the friend of St. Jerome, was the head of a monastery. Marcella[3] and Lea[4]

[1] See *Die Entwicklung des alten Mönchtums in Italien*, by P. Ernest Spreitzenhofer, O.S.B.

[2] St. Jer., Epp. 66 and 77.

[3] *Ibid.*, 127.

[4] *Ibid.*, 23.

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ruled nunneries. St. Ambrose's sister[1] was an inmate of a Roman nunnery. St. Augustine[2] mentions with admiration the number and piety of the Roman monks and nuns. A series of popes from Damasus[3] to Leo the Great either legislated for or founded monasteries.

2. *Northern Italy.*—Eusebius of Vercellae founded a monastery for his clergy shortly after he was consecrated bishop in 355.[4] There was an ascetic society, of which Rufinus was a member, in Aquileia before 360.[5] St. Martin of Tours[6] founded a monastery in Milan. Whether it survived or not we do not know, but during the episcopate of St. Ambrose there were two monasteries[7] and a nunnery[8] in that city.

3. *Southern Italy.*—Paulinus of Nola[9] founded a monastery especially intended for his clergy. He died in 431. Bishop Severus founded another at Naples.[10] A monastery governed by Abbot Urseius[11] existed at Pinetum in the year 400.

[1] St. Amb., *De Virgin*, iii. 1, 1.
[2] *De Mor. Eccl. Cath.*, i. 70.
[3] Damasus, Siricius and Innocent I. Sixtus III. founded a monastery in the catacombs (see *Spr.*, as above, pp. 10, 11, 12).
[4] St. Ambrose, Ep. 73 (to the Church at Vercellae), par. 71.
[5] *Vita Rufini* in Migne, *P. L.*, 21, p. 80.
[6] *Vita*, by Sulpicius Severus, c. vi.
[7] Aug., *Conf.*, viii. 15; and *De Mor. Eccl. Cath.*, i. 70.
[8] St. Ambr., *De Virgin.*, i. 57.
[9] St. Jer., Ep. 58 (*ad Paulinum*); see also *Spr.*, as above, p. 21.
[10] Ughelli, *Italia Sacra*, vi.
[11] See Pref. to Ruf. transl. of St. Basil's rules.

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4. *Gaul.*—St. Martin of Tours[1] founded his famous monastery about the year 360. Cassian[2] regulated the lives of the monks in Massilia early in the fifth century.

5. *Islands.*—There were monasteries on the islands in the Mediterranean sea, off the coast of Dalmatia, in 406.[3] Honoratus founded the famous society of Lerins early in the fifth century.[4]

This list, though not complete, is sufficient to show that though the impulse to monasticism came from the East, the institution flourished greatly in the West. Moreover, from the very first it took in the West a distinctive character, and developed quite independently of Egypt or the East. When we examine in detail such information as we possess about the early Western foundations, we are struck at once with certain peculiar features.

In the East monasticism began and developed in almost entire independence of the clergy and bishops. It had, indeed, great episcopal patrons like St. Athanasius and St. Basil, but it was nowhere originated by the bishops. St. Athanasius, so far as we know, founded no monastery; and if St. Basil organised the Cappadocian monks, his work was not that of a founder so much as a reformer. The monks existed in the East and in

[1] *Vita*, by Sulpicius Severus, c. x.
[2] Pref. to *Inst.* of Cassian.
[3] St. Jer., Ep. 118.
[4] He died in 429.

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Egypt before St. Basil or St. Athanasius recognised or helped them. In the West it seems at first to have been chiefly the bishops who founded monasteries. Eusebius of Vercellae, St. Martin of Tours, St. Ambrose of Milan, Paulinus of Nola, Severus of Naples, St. Augustine, and Sixtus III.[1] were all bishops, as well as founders of communities. St. Jerome and Rufinus were both great ecclesiastics, as well as great monks, and played an important part in the Church life of their time. So it happened that very early Western monasticism assumed a form which, if it existed at all, was very rare in Egypt or the East. Clergy and bishops lived together, regulating their lives along the lines of monastic discipline. Such clerical communities were founded, for instance, by Eusebius at Vercellae, Paulinus at Nola, and Augustine at Hippo.[2] This combination of priestly work with ascetic discipline may be regarded as a natural outcome of the practical bent of the Western mind; but it is certainly an evidence of the favourable attitude of the bishops towards monasticism. Thus, whereas in the East monks and bishops were distrustful of each other, and schism at times seemed imminent, in the West bishops and monks were from the first in cordial agreement.

I see in this fact one of the conditions which

[1] See previous notes.

[2] The Church at Rhinocorura is the only example I know of a similar organisation in the East.

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rendered possible the great work which the Western monks afterwards accomplished. The monk became accustomed to the ungrudged admiration of the Church. He gave in return enthusiastic service and complete devotion to the Church's cause. In the East the repeated enactments of councils and emperors kept the monks conscious that they were distrusted. They came, therefore, to live isolated lives. Of course, both in the East and West there were times when the condition of affairs was entirely different. There were Eastern bishops who honoured and used the monks. There were Western bishops who were jealous and distrustful. Yet I believe that, in the main, the early attitude of the bishops and clergy towards the monks, both in the East and the West, affected the whole subsequent history of monasticism, in the one case for evil, or at least for uselessness, in the other case altogether for good.

Next we notice that in the West the movement was to a great extent aristocratic. In Egypt the monks were chiefly drawn from the lower classes.[1] Farmers and tradesmen thronged the Nitrian deserts and the Pachomian monasteries. In the East, with some notable exceptions, the same thing is probably true. The most renowned ascetics were not men of noble families. In the West it is very noticeable that a great number of the first monks and nuns came from the aristocracy. Paula, Blesilla,

[1] See Weingarten, *Ursprung*, p. 49.



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Paulina, Marcella, Lea, Melania, and others were great ladies.[1] They belonged to families accustomed to the profuse luxury of the Roman patricians, to a multitude of servants, constant feasts, to jewels, and wardrobes packed with clothes. They bore names which commanded the respect of half the world. Pammachius was a senator of noble rank.[2] St. Jerome himself belonged to a good and at one time wealthy family.[3] Florentius,[4] "a distinguished monk," was at one time the owner of great wealth. Paulinus[5] of Nola belonged to a noble family. St. Martin[6] and St. Ambrose[7] came from the upper classes. This by no means exhausts the list that might be made, but it is sufficient to show how strongly the monastic ideal appealed to the upper classes. Right through the history of Western monasticism down to the time of St. Francis of Assisi the same thing remains true. We are astonished at the number of aristocratic names which meet us in the annals of the Benedictine order. Taking the single period of the Clugniac reform,[8] almost every leader in it is connected with the great feudal aristocracy.

Here, again, I see one of the causes of the great

[1] See St. Jer., Ep. 66.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] St. Jer., Ep. 4, and *Chron. ad.* A.D. 381.
[5] St. Jer., Ep. 58.
[6] *Vita.*, ii.
[7] His father was prefect of Gaul.
[8] See Sackur, *Die Cluniacenser*, vol. i.

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influence of Western monasticism. The Egyptian fellah was incapable, from want of education, of appreciating the value of learning. In Egypt the monks as a whole never became a learned body. On the other hand, the noble families of the West had preserved at least a respect for culture, and we see St. Jerome's noble ladies readily sharing his scholastic work. The Benedictine monks were able to preserve for Europe the remnants of classical learning, partly because their ranks were recruited from the only class in the community which possessed even a tradition of culture. Even in the darkest periods of the Middle Ages knowledge gave its possessors a certain power. In another way, too, their recruits from the upper classes added to the power and influence of the Western monks. A scion of a great family may be content to renounce the world and forget his rank while he labours in the peaceful monastery garden. Yet the world does not altogether forget him and who he was. His relations among the feudal chiefs will protect his monastery for his sake; and some day, when he is prior or abbot, will listen to his proposal of a truce of God or consent to abide by his arbitration, when they would have turned a deaf ear to the protests of an enfranchised serf. Thus at the very first there was impressed upon monasticism in the West a characteristic which never marked it either in Egypt or in the East.

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Western monasticism was no slavish imitation of the earlier types. It is true that it drew its first inspiration from Egypt through St. Athanasius. Also during the earlier years of its existence it constantly looked to Egypt and the East for patterns of life. The intercourse between the Western and the Eastern monks was frequent.[1] I believe that St. Athanasius[2] addressed his *Vita Antonii* to the Western monks. Certainly very soon after he wrote it, it was translated into Latin,[3] and was both widely read and highly influential throughout the West. St. Jerome was personally acquainted with the life of the Eastern cloisters, and provided biographies of its heroes for Latin readers.[4] Rufinus translated into Latin the *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*.[5] Sulpicius Severus preserved in his *Dialogues* the experiences of Postumian among the Egyptian monks. Honoratus of Lerins, Eusebius of Vercellae,

[1] St. Anthanasius, Ammonius, a Nitrian monk one of the "tall brothers," and Isodorus visited Italy from Egypt. Besides St. Jerome, Rufinus, Evagrius, Heliodorus, Hylas, Postumianus, Petronius, Melania, and others visited the East. Cassian spent most of his life in Egypt and the East.

[2] Weingarten, in his *Ursprung*, of course denies this, but his whole position rests upon the assumption that there were no monks in Italy in the days of St. Athanasius. Spreitzenhofer, in his book, cited above, shows that this assumption is altogether unjustifiable. That the *Vita Antonii* was addressed to the monks of the West is by far the most natural interpretation of the opening chapter (see Appendix ii.).

[3] By Evagrius in or before 373.

[4] *Vitae Pauli, St. Hilarionis, Malchi.*

[5] See Appendix ii.

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and other great Western monks gained experience in the East. St. Jerome probably only expressed the general feeling when he said that the Westerns ought to take the great heroes of Eastern asceticism for their patterns. "Let Roman generals[1] imitate Camillus, Fabricius, Regulus, and Scipio. Let philosophers take for their models Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Let us monks take as patterns which we are to follow the lives of Paul, of Antony, of Julian, of Hilarion, and of the Macarii."

This imitation, however, was no mere attempt to reproduce the detail and circumstance of the Eastern ascetic life. The vitality of the movement in the West is in no way more clearly evidenced than in the fact that the Westerns accepted what was best in the spirit of Eastern asceticism, and boldly ignored what was non-essential in its form. The Western ascetics never attempted to imitate the extraordinary fasts of the Egyptians, still less the eccentricities of self-torture, which were common in Syria and Mesopotamia. Cassian, in the Preface to his *Institutes*, plainly states that he intends to modify the severity of the Egyptian discipline which, he declares, it would be difficult or impossible to imitate in the climate of Gaul, and which, in any case, would be unsuitable for men of other habits. His intention is to base Western practice in certain cases upon the modified asceticism which St. Basil recommended.

[1] Ep. 58.

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Twice[1] in the course of his *Institutes* he points out cases in which he has modified the Egyptian use. A Gaulish monk, in the first dialogue of Sulpicius Severus, defends himself against a charge of gluttony with these words: "The love of eating is gluttony among the Greeks, whereas among the Gauls it is owing to the nature which they possess."

The lives of the Western monks and nuns were indeed severely ascetic, yet compared to that of the Egyptians their discipline was mild. When we read of the Senator Pammachius[2] going barefoot in sombre dress among the poor, washing the feet of the poor, carrying water for the infirm, hewing wood for them and lighting fires, giving all his property in alms and living upon the coarsest food, we marvel at his asceticism. Eustochium and Paula[3] were once too dainty to cross a muddy street or walk over uneven ground. They found a silk dress too heavy a burden, and sheltered themselves from sunshine. Afterwards we read of them squalid in their dress, trimming lamps, lighting fires, sweeping floors, cleaning vegetables, putting cabbage into pots to boil, laying tables, handing cups, fasting, and patiently enduring scorn. We are astonished at the completeness of their self-denial. Yet there is nothing which excites our scepticism or raises a feeling of disgust.

This modification of physical asceticism is a third characteristic feature of Western monasticism. St.

[1] Bk. i., 10. [2] St. Jer., Ep. 66. [3] *Ibid.*

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Basil's influence in the East worked, as we have seen, in the same direction, but it was not sufficiently powerful to prevent the establishment there of fiercely ascetic orders. In the West, up to the time of the final establishment of the Benedictine rule throughout the whole of Italy, Gaul, and England, the genius of the movement made for moderation and the diminishing of the struggle against the body. This fact, too, helps to explain the power and fruitfulness of Western monasticism. When, as in Syria, the energies of the monks were directed mainly to the making of records in fasting or sleeplessness, the best men were almost inevitably abstracted from all forms of useful work. In the West the restricted asceticism of the Benedictine monk was sufficient to free him from the bondage of the flesh or the love of the world's rewards, without so cramping his spiritual energy as to leave him an apathetic spectator of religious decadence in the Church. The tenth century is probably the most glorious period in the history of Benedictine monasticism. In it we see the great leaders of the Clugniac reform weaned by the asceticism of the rule from fear of the world's anger, or desire of the world's favour, and yet prepared to direct all their energies and power to the great task of raising the Church from the slough into which she had fallen.

There is yet another feature of Western monasti-

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cism which has done more to shape its history than its alliance with the clergy, its hold upon the upper classes, or the comparative mildness of its discipline. From the very first Western monasticism shows a tendency towards organisation and legislation. At first there were no definite rules, but there existed a desire for rules. No doubt, as Cassian[1] tells us, there were as many systems of life as there were monasteries in the West, and in each the will of the abbot was the real rule of life—an unwritten rule, liable to change as experience or caprice might suggest. No monk was bound to his monastery for longer than he chose to stay. If he did not like the rules, or rather the ruling of his abbot, he was free to go and seek another asylum where the life was more to his taste. Even down to the time of St. Benedict[2] the system of government by the simple will of an abbot persisted in many monasteries. Very early, however, there appeared here and there a desire for a written and established rule. Naturally men looked to the East for what they wanted. For instance, St. Jerome translated into Latin the rule of St. Pachomius. It does not seem to have been widely influential in the West, although it formed the basis of a "Rule for Monks" drawn up by Vigilius about the year 432. In 398 Rufinus, at the request of Abbot Urseius of Pinetus, translated and edited

[1] *Inst.*, ii. 1. Cf. Ruf., Pref. in *Reg. St. Bas. ad Urseium.*

[2] "Militans sub regulâ *vel* Abbate."—*Reg.*, c. i.

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the *Regulae* of St. Basil. He combined St. Basil's two *Regulae* into one, and although he still preserved the original catechetical form, he gave to his work more the character of a rule than it possessed in its original shape. Some time about the year 405 Cassian wrote his *Institutes*, for the use of monks in the south of Gaul. This work is really less an actual rule than a collection of materials out of which a rule might be formed. Cassian wrote down what he recollected of the practices of the Egyptian monks and hermits. He tells of their dress, their fasting, the order of their monasteries, their hours of divine service, their system of reciting the psalter. He suggests modifications of their discipline in some respects.

Honoratus gave a rule of life to his monks at Lerins. This rule was not written, but preserved by oral tradition, and our knowledge of it now is very slight.

There are suggestions of some sort of rule in St. Jerome's epistles. For instance, he writes to Demetrias:[1] "In addition to the rules of psalmody and prayer, which you must always observe at the third, sixth, and ninth hours, at evening, at midnight, and at dawn, you must determine how much time you will give to the learning and reading of Scripture. When you have spent your allotted time in these studies, often kneeling down to pray, as care

[1] Ep. 130.

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of your soul will impel you to do, have some wool always at hand; shape the threads into yarn. By observing such rules as these you will save yourself and others." This is the germ of a rule for the guidance of nuns. Its inspiration comes from the East.

The first original Latin rule was also intended for the use of nuns. St. Augustine's *Regula Sanctimonialibus Praescripta* took the form of a letter[1] addressed to the inmates of a convent at Hippo. After an exhortation to unity, he lays down definite laws for the government of the community. All property is to be held in common. The distinctions of rank which separated the nuns in the world are to be obliterated. Fasting is to be practised so far as health and strength permit. Dress is to be simple and modest. A course of procedure is arranged for dealing with offenders. The nuns are to have a common wardrobe, from which clothes are given out from time to time. The prioress is held responsible for the observance of the rules. Due obedience is to be rendered to her.

This rule shows us the direction in which monasticism was developing in the West. Its ascetic requirements are moderate. It aims at a high degree of organisation. It legislates for details. It provides special treatment for the sick and infirm. It deals with the community as a *family* and the prioress as

[1] Ep. 211, written 423 A.D.

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the mother of the family. It is important not only as the first Latin rule, but as the type of most of the later rules for convents.[1] Caesarius of Arles based his *Regula ad Virgines* upon it. It was also, perhaps in St. Augustine's lifetime, transformed into a rule for monks by the simple process of altering the genders all through. It is, however, the only genuine rule of St. Augustine. He founded, we know, a community of clergy at Hippo which was the original type of the later Augustinian canons, but he wrote no rule for them, and the three rules which pass under his name are works of a later time.

Of these early efforts at legislation, which all belong to the first half of the fifth century, by far the most important for the student of later monasticism are Rufinus' edition of St. Basil and Cassian's *Institutes*. The numerous rules which came into existence during the sixth century are all based upon these two. The two great types of the older asceticism, the Egyptian and the Greek, had each its share in the creation of the Western monastic system—the one represented by Cassian and the other by Rufinus' edition of St. Basil. With one exception the various Western writers dealt with their materials in the same spirit. They[2] worked out detailed legislation from general principles. They

[1] See Zöckler's note upon it in *Askese u. Mönchtum*, p. 354.

[2] These rules will be found in Holstenius, *Cod. Reg. Monast.*, and some in Migne's *P. L.*, vol. 66.

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eliminated the individualistic competitive spirit and subordinated the monk completely to the community. They reduced asceticism within reasonable limits. Individual points of interest exist in most of these rules, but they all more or less represent the result of the development of monasticism in the West. The one exception is the Irish rule of St. Columbanus. It presents peculiar features which differentiate it from all rules Eastern or Western, but with regard to its asceticism it is a reversion to the older and severer Egyptian type.[1] It is therefore outside the stream of Western development. For a long time, in virtue of its peculiarities, it held its own in Europe and resisted longer than any other rule the process of absorption into the Benedictine.

Incomparably the greatest of all the rules to which the sixth century gave birth is that of St. Benedict. Of the author, the saint himself, we know comparatively little. He looms dimly great through a mist of uncertainty and myth. It is very difficult to realise him as a man, to get even a glimpse of his personality. When we have said that he was very wise, very loving, and very earnest, we can add no more, and such a description is only to transfer to the author what are really the epithets of the Rule he wrote. Born about 450, he gave his life to the

[1] Cibus sit vilis et vespertinus monachorum. Olera, legumina, farina, cum parvo paximatio ne venter onereretur. Quotidie jejunundum est, sicut quotidie orandum (Reg. St. Columb., iii.). See also his "Poenitentiale," given in Holstenius.

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service of God and monasticism. He met with disappointment in his efforts to infuse spirituality into the lives of monks with whom he came in contact. He studied diligently the lives of the Egyptian fathers, the writings of Rufinus and of Cassian. Finally, at Monte Casino, he formulated his famous rule.[1]

It detracts nothing from the honour of the author to recognise that his rule is not a creation, but a moulding of existing materials into a form consistent with the spirit of Western monasticism. To create what is absolutely new requires, no doubt, genius. To grasp the salient points in what is old, and to harmonise them with all that is best in what is new, requires not only genius, but wisdom and sympathy. The parallels between the enactments of the Benedictine rule and the two great works of St. Basil and Cassian are numerous and interesting.[2] The points in which St. Benedict differs from St. Basil are comparatively few. In accordance with the general feeling of the West his ascetic requirements are milder. He gives his monks good and sufficient food. He allows them wine.[3] He permits a reasonable amount of unbroken sleep.[4] On the other hand, he aimed at a complete exclusion of the world from the monastery. The Basilian monk dwelt in or near

[1] Greg., Dial. ii.

[2] See Grützmacher's study of the points of resemblance in his *Die Bedeutung Benedikts von Nursia u. s. R.*, pp. 38 and ff.

[3] Cf. Bened., 39–41, with Basil (Ruf.), 11. [4] St. Bened., 22.

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a city. He was often the superintendent of an almshouse or hospital. Under the Benedictine rule all connection with the world outside the monastery was, as far as possible, prevented. No monk whose duty called him outside the monastery walls was to talk afterwards of what he had seen or heard.[1] No monk might receive a letter from a friend or relation without the permission of the abbot.[2] The single exception to this absolute separation from the world is the chapter which enjoins the reception of all guests who might present themselves.[3] But even intercourse with guests is strictly limited to specially appointed monks. Finally, there is a difference in spirit. St. Basil prefers to lay down general principles of action, and to leave their application to particular cases in the hands of the abbot. St. Benedict legislates for details.

In comparing the Benedictine rule with the *Institutes* of Cassian we find two other notable points of difference. St. Benedict[4] permits a monk to endow his monastery with the whole or part of the property which he renounced at his profession. He also insists upon the *stabilitas loci*.[5] He fixes his monk in the particular monastery where he makes his vows. This is a most important point. By this regulation the last vestige of freedom is taken from the monk.

[1] St. Bened., 67. [2] *Ibid.*, 54. [3] *Ibid.*, 53.
[4] *Ibid.*, 58; cf. *Instit.*, iv. 4.
[5] *Ibid.*, 4, "*Stabilitas in congregatione.*"

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He is not only bound to obey, but he no longer has any choice about whom to obey, or where and to what rule his obedience is to be rendered. Once the final vow is made, the monk is born into a family. He is a child, and the abbot is his father. Not any more than a child has he the power to choose a new father or a new home. This comparison is just, for the Benedictine rule is founded upon the idea of a family. Love is the ruling inspiration of all his legislation. Discipline is necessary not, as in the case of an army, for the sake of making an organisation effective, but, as in a family, to let love find its perfect expression in peace. The monks are children constrained by one who is wiser than they are to go upon ways that are best for them. Only at the election of a new abbot[1] do the monks choose for themselves. Once elected, the abbot is absolute. There is no power beyond his, except the power of the written rule. He is responsible to none but God for what he does.

These six points constitute the advance which St. Benedict made in his rule upon St. Basil's directions and Cassian's *Institutes*. They are all in accordance with the general tendencies of Western monasticism. They all, as it is easy to see, tended to make the monks great, as they never previously had been, for the propagation of the faith, the strengthening of the Church, and the advance of civilisation. The legis-

[1] St. Bened., 64.

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lative spirit of the new rules effected a unity in the cloister and among the monasteries hitherto unknown. The insistence upon the *stabilitas loci*, the absolute exclusion of worldly interests, and the sense of common property given by its members to the community fostered in the highest degree the corporate spirit within the monastery, which definite legislation had sharply severed from the world outside. The deliberate elimination of austerities, constituting the Benedictine a *minima inchoationis regula*, widened the horizon of monastic religion. The pervading sense of a father's love and a father's care, the insistence upon obedience as to a father, preserved in mediæval life one region where men found tenderness. And this tenderness, so pathetic amid all the fierceness of perpetual war, was a reality. It is with no mere figure that St. Benedict opens the Preface to his rule, "Ansculta *fili*—admonitionem pii *patris* libenter excipe."

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# THE BENEDICTINE RULE
# ITS SPREAD AND ITS IDEAL

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O pulchras acies castraque fortia
Quae spes, una fides, unus amor regit !
Omnes lege sub unâ
Uno sub duce militant.

Heu ! quantis rapiunt astra laboribus
Pulsant perpetuis questibus aethera,
Per jejunia longa
Vires corporis atterunt.

Votis unanimes, vi quoque fletuum
Instant, et socias ingeminant preces,
Et concordibus armis
Vim coelo simul inferunt.

Fervent quando die cuncta tumultibus,
Altum turba silet ; caetera dum tacent,
Hi per cantica rumpunt
Noctis longa silentia.

Exercet vigiles continuus labor ;
Incumbent operi non resides manus ;
Tellus culta colonis
Victum suppeditat suis.

Quin regina sui mens quoque subditur,
Rectorisque studet nutibus obsequi ;
Nil servat sibi juris
Capto liberior jugo.

*Paris Breviary.*

Jesus said—Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My sake, and the gospel's,

But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this present time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions ; and in the world to come eternal life.

Jesus said—Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Tu mihi curarum requies, tu nocte vel atra
Lumen, et in solis tu mihi turba locis.

TIBULLUS

(*seen by St. Francis of Sales, written over a monk's cell*).

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## CHAPTER VIII

# THE BENEDICTINE RULE—ITS SPREAD AND ITS IDEAL

THE Benedictine rule was the work of a man who had studied the history of early monasticism and was familiar with its literature. This is evident not only from the direct references which the rule makes to the writings of St. Basil and Cassian, but from the resemblance which it bears in many points to older rules. It is also clearly the work of a man with a profound knowledge of human nature, and of one who was in full sympathy with the peculiar development of Western monasticism. The rule, in fact, fixed and stereotyped the Western development in a permanent form. It was therefore natural that the Benedictine rule should have spread as it did from abbey to abbey, and that it should have been generally accepted as the rule of new foundations. I think, however, that having regard simply to the merit of the rule itself, we should scarcely have expected it to become as it did the universal Western rule, the single model of monastic life. Yet this is the position which it ultimately



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attained. Three centuries after the foundation of the monastery of Monte Casino, Charles the Great[1] caused an inquiry to be made among the bishops and abbots of his dominions as to what other rule or rules had existed before St. Benedict's became universal. Apparently not even the recollection of any other rule survived in 811.

The story of the spread of the rule over Europe is both interesting and instructive. St. Benedict founded the monastery of Monte Casino in 509.[2] I suppose that his rule was written originally for the monks of that abbey, and that it occupied the saint up to, or nearly up to, the time of his death in 542. There are signs in the rule itself that its composition occupied a considerable space of time.[3] Probably Monte Casino was from its very foundation governed in accordance with the spirit of the rule, for St. Benedict had already had considerable experience of an abbot's duties. He had attempted to reform the life of the monks of a monastery at Vicovarra,

[1] "Inquirendum est—quâ regulâ monachi vixissent in Galliâ priusquam regula sancti Benedicti in eâ tradita fuisset cum legamus sanctum Martinum et monachum fuisse et sub se monachos habuisse, qui multo ante sancto Benedicto fuit."—*Car. Mag. capit. D. Aquis.* (an. 811).

[2] The chronology is a little uncertain.

[3] For instance, in chapter v. we read: "Primus gradus humilitatis est obedientia sine morâ," and in chapter vii., "Primus humilitatis gradus est, si timorem Dei sibi ante oculos semper ponens, oblivionem omnino fugiat et semper sit memor omnium, quae praecepit Deus." There is, of course, no real opposition between the two statements. They are simply such as a man might make who took up his work from time to time with considerable intervening intervals.

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and had ruled twelve communities of his own founding at Subiaco. During St. Benedict's lifetime the rule seems scarcely to have been known outside of Monte Casino. We are, indeed, told of the foundation of a daughter monastery at Terracina,[1] but even if the story is true the foundation was unimportant. Terracina has no history. Perhaps it perished during the troubles caused by the Lombards in the later half of the century. The traditions of the foundation of Benedictine monasteries in Gaul and Sicily by St. Maurus and St. Placidus and others are untrustworthy.[2] According to a letter written to Simplicius, third abbot of Monte Casino,[3] the rule was generally observed in Italy before 580. This letter may possibly be genuine, and if so we are entirely in the dark about the details of the spread of the rule.

Apart from this, the history of the spread of the rule may be divided into two periods, and in each period there is a great name. The first reaches from 580 up to 700, and in it the spread of the rule is associated with the name of Gregory the Great. The second period reaches to the age of Charles the Great, and in it the prominent name is that of St. Boniface. Each of these men had an idea which affected the history of his period. Gregory aimed at the spread of monasticism without insisting

[1] Greg., *II. Dial.*, 22. [2] Mab., *Ann. Bened.*, lib. iv. and v.

[3] "Huc afferri potest vulgata Fundani abbatis epistola 'reverentissimo monachorum patri Simplicio' inscripta in quâ testatur—jam tempore suo omnia Campaniae, Samniae, Valeriae, etc. Benedictam (regulam) servare decrevisse" and ff.—Mab., *Ann. Bened.*, vii. 2.

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specially on the Benedictine type. Boniface aimed at reducing all monasticism to a uniform obedience to a single rule, and that rule the Benedictine. In both periods the impulse came from Rome, and the work was done under the patronage and with the approval of the popes.

Viewing it in this way, the first event of real importance in the history of the Benedictine order was the destruction of the monastery of Monte Casino by the Lombards[1] in 580. The monks fled to Rome, where they were received by Pope Pelagius II., and established in a monastery near the Lateran.[2] Gregory, the future Pope, was then the head of the monastery of St. Andrew, which he had himself founded in 575. He had, therefore, an opportunity before his elevation of knowing and appreciating the Benedictine rule. It is possible that he introduced it into his own monastery before he became Pope, in which case he may rightly be claimed as a Benedictine monk. It seemed fairly certain that the rule had been accepted by this monastery before St. Augustine's mission to England in 595.[3] Gregory

[1] Mab., *Ann.*, vii. 1.

[2] "Hi (*i.e.* monachi) in urbem Romam, cum sanctae Regulae autographo et quibusdam aliis scriptis aliaque modica supellectile perfugii causâ se se retulerunt, Pelagio Secundo pontifice, qui proximum Lateranensi patriarcho locum, eis ad construendum monasterium concessit."—Mab., *Ann.*, vii. i. See also Paul Diac., iv. 18.

[3] "Quod vero monachi qui a Gregorio in Saxoniam missi, sancti Benedicti regulae fuerint mancipati, inter alia etiam illudos tendit, quod ex ipsius discipulis vix potest in illis partibus monachus aliquis inveniri a quo non observetur tam in proposito quam in habitu regula Benedicti." —Johann Diac., *V. St. Greg.*, iv. 82.

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the Great certainly preferred the Benedictine rule to any other. He gave it, some time after their foundation, to the six monasteries which he had established in Sicily. It was carried by his missionary, St. Augustine, to England, and became the rule of the abbey of the Holy Redeemer[1] in Canterbury. After Gregory's death it was firmly established in many monasteries in France and Italy. No doubt the Pope used the great political influence which he possessed with the Frankish kings, and with Theodelinda, Queen of the Lombards, and it enabled him to regulate monastic affairs in their dominions. At the same time, Gregory made no attempt to enforce the Benedictine as the sole type of monastic life. He readily confirmed the privileges which one of his predecessors[2] had granted to the monastery of Arles, where the monks lived under the rule of St. Caesarius.

Gregory's greatest work for the Benedictines did not lie in the actual enforcing of the rule in old or new monasteries. In the second book of his *Dialogues* he narrates the story of St. Benedict's life. He pronounces what is nothing less than a panegyric upon the saint, and speaks of his rule as "discretione praecipua, sermone luculenta."[3] The biography is unreliable, but it was very widely read. Bearing the name of so great and so justly honoured

[1] Mab., *Ann. Bened.*, tom. i., App. i., pars. 2, 3.
[2] See his *Epistles*, ix. 111 and vii. 12. [3] c. 36.

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a man as its author, this work carried with it great authority. After Gregory's death it continued the work he had begun while alive, and prepared the way for the reception of the Benedictine rule in European monasteries.

Throughout the whole course of the seventh century enthusiastic admirers of the saint strove to introduce his rule. Thus Aigulf,[1] who is credited with having brought the bones of St. Benedict to Fleury, introduced the rule into the monastery of Lerins,[2] of which he became abbot. He seems to have simply substituted it for the old traditional rule of Honoratus. Sometimes the Benedictine existed side by side with some other rule in the same monastery. This was the case in Bobbio,[3] founded in 609 by St. Columbanus. We read that there the monks lived either under the rule of St. Benedict or St. Columbanus. Occasionally efforts were made to combine the Benedictine with the older rule. Thus Donatus[4] of Besançon made an attempt to create a new rule by uniting those

[1] Mab., *Ann.*, xiv. 29.

[2] This was not done without considerable opposition. The monks of Lerins had sunk into a degraded condition, and were naturally opposed to a reforming abbot and a new and strict rule (see Mab., *Ann. Bened.*, xv. 18).

[3] "Ejus (*i.e.* Boboleni Abbatis, A. D. 640) tempore centum et quadraginta monachi in monasterio Bobiensi degebant sub regula sanctae memoriae Benedicti vel reverendissimi Columbani."—Mab., *Ann. Bened.*, xiii. 3.

[4] Holsten., *Cod. Reg. Monach.*, iii. 78. The same sort of union of rules was made apparently in several French monasteries, *e.g.* Luxeuil, Solignac, and others.

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of Caesarius of Arles and Columbanus with the Benedictine.

Recognising that the Benedictine rule is not an absolutely rigid code, we are not surprised that it should itself have undergone some practical modification in the course of its extension. The letter of the rule remained unaltered, but portions of it became emphasised, and the resulting monastic life was perhaps different from that contemplated by St. Benedict. For instance, the rule enjoins the reading of Holy Scripture and the writings of the fathers. No one, however, would guess from the text of the rule that its adherents would ever become great scholars. It leaves learning possible for the monks. It neither suggests nor recommends it. On the other hand, some of the other rules which the Benedictine ultimately superseded laid considerable emphasis on scholarship as a monastic duty. The rule of Cassiodorus[1] is one example, that of Ferreolus[2] another. On coming into contact with rules like these the Benedictine life would naturally be modified. In such ways, no doubt, many practical glosses came

[1] It is not accurate to speak of the rule of Cassiodorus. Possibly his monastery of Vivariense was placed under the Benedictine rule. If so, he evidently felt himself at liberty to make such alterations as seemed to him desirable. He lays great stress on the necessity for learning, and regards the labour of the farm and garden as a substitute for work in the library in the case of such monks as have no ability or education, and quotes Virgil in recommending farm work to the illiterate.

[2] c., xi., and xxvi., Holsten., ii.

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to exist as authorised comments upon the original text of the rule.

In England alone during this period the Benedictine rule began to arrive at recognition as the only true type of monastic life. Its progress was furthered by such men as Wilfrid of York[1] and Benedict Biscop.[2] In Spain, owing no doubt to the political isolation of the country, the Benedictine rule made little progress.

During this period, then, the Benedictine rule became known in Rome. It won the admiration and support of Gregory the Great. His missionaries introduced it into England. His writings recommended it in France and Italy. It made its way from monastery to monastery, and took possession of most new foundations; but the idea of uniformity of monastic rule had not yet appeared.

The next period, which may be said roughly to cover the eighth century, saw the Benedictine rule finally established as the only recognised and authorised form of monastic life in Italy, France, England, and Germany. The great influence during this period is that of St. Boniface, who worked in complete harmony with three successive popes—Gregory II., Gregory III., and Zacharias. St. Boniface was an Englishman and a monk of the Benedictine abbey of Nutschell. He has been called

[1] Mab., *Ann. Bened.*, xv. 36 and ff.
[2] Bede, *Vit. SS. Abb.*, i.

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the apostle of Germany, for although he was preceded in his work by Irish missionaries, he accomplished what they had only attempted. His energies were directed to two ends—the conversion of absolutely heathen tribes and the reduction of the independent Christianity of the Irish converts to the Roman obedience.[1] He was primarily a missionary, and secondarily, having regard to the condition of the independent clergy, a reformer.[2] In both capacities he sounded the death-knell of the Columban type of monasticism,[3] the only type which still maintained itself against the Benedictine.

His monastery of Fulda, over which Sturm[4] presided as abbot, became the model of German monasteries. Sturm, at the request of Boniface, had resided for some time at Monte Casino[5] (rebuilt by Gregory II.), in order to master thoroughly the working of the Benedictine rule. A series of councils, in which Boniface's influence may be traced,[6] established the Benedictine rule in France, Germany, and England to the exclusion of every other. The popes in Italy worked for the same end. Gregory II. had been himself a Benedictine monk. His re-establishment of Monte Casino[7] gave to the order a mother

[1] *Vita St. Bonif.*, 15. [2] *Ibid.*, i. 8, 23. [3] *Ibid.*, 36.

[4] The picturesque story of the founding of Fulda will be found in *Ann. O. St. B.*, saec. iii., pt. 2, p. 267.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 251.

[6] Especially Liptinensis (743), where all monks were ordered to receive the rule of St. Benedict.

[7] Paul Diac., *Hist. Lango.*, vi. 40.

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abbey and a central point of union. Pope Zacharias laid the foundation of its famous library,[1] and is supposed to have granted its monks exemption from the power of their bishop.

Thus, before the coronation of Charles the Great, Western monasticism, with the exception of some Spanish cloisters, was united into a single order. The monks formed one vast brotherhood, living similar lives, obeying the same rule. A monk might travel from England to Rome, from Fulda in the German forests to Fleury, and find himself everywhere among familiar surroundings. For him the world held a thousand homes, a thousand fathers. Everywhere he found the same work waiting for him, broad harvest fields for reaping, schools to teach in, libraries to learn in. Everywhere he joined the same round of daily worship, the familiar alternations of psalm and lesson and prayer. From every home his heart turned with wondering respect to the great patron and protector who sat upon the apostle's seat in Rome. He had for his Master's sake left houses and lands and father and mother, and he found it literally true that in this present life he received a hundredfold more houses and lands and fathers and mothers. Certainly the remainder of the prophecy was also true of him—"with persecutions,"

[1] He gave back to the monastery "regulam quam beatus pater Benedictus suis sanctis manibus conscripsit," which the monks had brought with them to Rome in the time of Pope Silvester II.

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but beyond them he looked for the end of it all, "everlasting life."

This great brotherhood, under the patronage and protection of the Pope, was the result of the development of monasticism in the West. In it we have something so different from the early expressions of the ascetic spirit that we are tempted to ask whether it is really a development at all, and not rather something wholly new. The gentle spirit[1] which ordained that all should be done according to the measure of the weak brother's ability is widely removed from the competitive individualism which led St. Macarius in disguise to the monastery of St. Pachomius[2] and taught him to surpass all others in the severity of his fasts. All the manifold activities of the Benedictine monastery—the reading, teaching, and husbandry—suggest a life utterly remote from that of the silent hermit in his desert cave whom the demons vexed. What has changed? Is the whole spirit of the life different, or is it only the accidents that have been shed off, the mistakes corrected, and the good that was in the earlier life focussed to the burning point? Is the Benedictine monk a legitimate descendant of St. Antony?

We must go further back still and ask whether or not this Western monasticism has caught and preserved the spirit of the apostolic Church. Is

[1] "Omnia tamen mensurate fiant propter pusillanimes."—St. Bened., *Reg.*, 48. [2] *Hist. Laus.*, 20.

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St. Benedict in real sympathy with the ascetic *motif* of St. John's Epistle? Does his rule breathe really the spirit of the Master, who said, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny"—abjure, disown—"himself, and follow Me."

I believe that the spirit of asceticism has been the same all through the history of the Church. To imitate Christ, that is the ascetic's desire. To renounce the world, that is the only course which seems to make a complete imitation impossible. The aim of the ascetic is to be good, even to the exclusion of the idea of doing good. Or, since the two things are really inseparable, to set the heart only on being good, and to let the doing follow as it can, as in the end it must. In the face of all the good that the Benedictines did, their services to the Church, to learning, and to civilisation, it is hard at first to realise that they never aimed at doing such things at all. Yet in their rule there is no suggestion of any object except the nurture of personal religion.

In the Prologue to his rule St. Benedict says plainly what it is that he is attempting to do. "We must found, therefore, a school for the service of the Lord.[1] Be not terrified and timid, so as not to enter upon the way of life, for the entrance of that way must be narrow. You must go upon the way of good conduct and of faith with a heart enlarged by

[1] "Constituenda est ergo a nobis dominici schola servitii."

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the unerring sweetness of love. So you will obey the commandments of God. By never departing from His tutelage, by persevering in His doctrine even unto death, we shall be partakers of the sufferings of Christ, and thus deserve to be companions of His kingdom."

It is this spirit which runs through the whole legislation of St. Benedict. Every chapter makes for the founding and perfecting of the school for the service of the Lord. There is nothing in it essentially different from that hunger and thirst after righteousness which drove St. Antony into the wilderness or led Pammachius to lay aside his senatorial robes.

It is true that the "school" was organised and ruled in a way altogether different from the first ascetic communities in the lauras. The abbot, once elected, was an absolute monarch. His power was limited only by the written rule. He must, indeed, consult his monks in cases of difficulty,[1] but every decision rested ultimately with him alone. The monk might tender his advice, but whether it was taken or rejected, his duty in the end was to obey. The abbot's power, however, was given him for one purpose only — that he might promote personal religion among the brethren. "Let him hold no low opinion[2] of the value of human souls, lest he give too much care to what is transitory, earthly,

[1] St. Bened., *Reg.*, 3.

[2] "Ne parvipendens salutem animarum sibi commissarum" (c. 2).

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fleeting. Always let him think how he has received souls to govern of whom he must give an account. So let him always dread the future inquiry of the Shepherd concerning the sheep entrusted to him."

It is one of the chief duties of the abbot to care for those who have been led astray and fallen into grievous faults. "Let the abbot follow the example of the Good Shepherd,[1] who left the ninety and nine in the wilderness and went to seek the one sheep that had gone astray. Of its weakness He was so compassionate that He deigned to take it on His holy shoulders and thus to carry it back to the flock." "If," says the rule again, "the abbot have tried the foments and ointments of exhortation, if the medicine of Holy Scripture, if he have cauterised with excommunication[2] and with stripes, if even then all his labour is unavailing, let him call upon the brethren to pray with him for the offender (for this is a remedy of more force than any), that the Lord, who can do all things, may work the cure of the brother. If even thus he be not healed, then let the abbot use the knife of amputation, lest one sick sheep contaminate the whole flock."[3]

This intense solicitude for the individual soul is a note of the whole rule. The Benedictine abbot

[1] c. 27.

[2] No one might speak to a monk under excommunication except certain brethren appointed specially by the abbot, who went to the offender privately. These were "consolatores sympectae" (c. 27).

[3] c. 28.

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might be a leader of missionaries or colonists, but these were accidents, and the work involved in such positions accidental. His true position was the mastership of a school for the service of the Lord. His real duty was to keep the brethren in the narrow way.

Unconditional obedience was required of the monk in every case, but not for the sake of perfect monastic discipline. "The first step in humility is to obey without delay. This befits those who feel that nothing is dearer to them than Christ and His service, which they have undertaken. Without doubt such as these imitate the thought of the Lord when He said, 'I came not to do Mine own will.'"[1] Obedience of the rank and file to a commander is always a condition for the success of any enterprise. Doubtless it was an element in the great success of the Benedictine work, but it was not enjoined in order to secure success. Humility is an essential part of the imitation of Christ, and obedience is the outward expression of humility. For this reason the monk must learn to obey.

Regular and systematic labour was part of the daily routine of life in a Benedictine monastery. According to the season of the year, a greater or less number of hours were spent in the fields.[2] The amount of food and drink might vary with the severity of the labour.[3] Even the duty of attending

[1] c. 5. [2] c. 48. [3] c. 39 and c. 40.



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chapel might, in some cases, give way to the claims of the farm.[1] Great results were attained by the farmer monks. Forests were cleared, land was broken up, and crops grown on it. The monks colonised and reclaimed great tracts of land. But all this was beside the purpose of the rule. It followed from regular and well-directed labour, but the labour itself was undertaken because "idleness is the enemy of the soul."[2] No monk should be grieved at having to work with his hands in the fields, for in so doing he becomes "a true monk, and lives by the labour of his hands, as did the fathers and the apostles."

The Benedictine monks have attained a great reputation for scholarship, but originally their reading was meant for a spiritual exercise and to provide subjects for meditation. "In Lent[3] each monk is to receive from the library a book which he is to read regularly and completely." The choice of each monk's book lay with the abbot, who gave him, not what he desired, but what seemed to be profitable in his individual case.[4] Certain senior monks presided over the reading of the monasteries; but these were not tutors or lecturers. They watched, "lest any be found yielding to accidie and passing the time in idleness."[5]

[1] c. 50. [2] "Otiositas est inimica animae" (c. 48). [3] c. 48.

[4] See Hildamar's note: "If the book asked for is thought unsuitable, the abbot replies, 'Non est tibi liber iste aptus, sed talis aptus est tibi et tunc non dabit illi quem quaesivit sed quem cognoverit illi aptum esse.'"

[5] c. 48.

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The monasteries were the almshouses of the Middle Ages. They received and lodged all travellers indiscriminately. Even in this work the monks were not primarily philanthropists. The gates of the convent were always open to the poor, to the hunted fugitive, to the weary traveller. No one can guess at the amount of misery the monks alleviated and the amount of charitable work they did. They asked no questions. Need was its own recommendation to them. But Benedict had not aimed at an organisation of charity. "Every stranger,"[1] he says, "who comes is to be received as if he were Christ Himself, for He says, 'I was a stranger, and ye took Me in.' When a stranger is announced let the prior or one of the brethren go to meet him and receive him with every sign of love. First let them pray together, and then let them join in the kiss of peace.[2] To all guests who come or go the head must be bowed or the whole body prostrated, and Christ adored in their persons, for it is Christ who is received. All guests who are received are to be brought to prayers. The divine law is to be read in the guest's presence, that he may be edified." Poor people and vagrants are to be specially honoured, "since Christ is specially received in them." Thus we see that the primary motive for hospitality was not philanthropy, but the

[1] c. 53.

[2] The kiss of peace is not to be given till after they have prayed together—"propter illusiones diabolicas." The saint here is mindful of the old Egyptian stories of diabolic deceptions.

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hope of winning some spiritual blessing, of coming mystically into touch with the person of Christ.

In the fourth chapter of the rule there is given a long list of virtues, which St. Benedict calls the "means of good works." The list is extremely significant. With the exception of some simple repetitions of scriptural injunctions, the list mentions only the virtues of personal religion. The eye is kept fixed upon the condition of the individual's soul, and never wanders to the consideration of the effect of his life upon the world.

Very suggestive, too, is the chapter[1] which describes the admission of new members to the order. The novice is put into a special cell to eat and sleep. There he is visited by an elder, one who is apt at winning souls. The elder diligently inquires[2] whether he "truly seeks after God, whether he is anxious to do the work of God, desirous to obey and to suffer. Let the elder declare to him how hard and rough is the way by which men go to God. If he promise steadfastness and perseverance, then after two months let the rule be read to him. Let him be told, 'Lo, this is the law under which you wish to enlist. If you are able to keep it, enter. If it is beyond your power, depart in peace.'" There is just one thing in the first instance indispensable for the candidate. He is not questioned about his fitness for any work,

[1] c. lviii.

[2] "Qui super eum omnino curiose intendat et sollicitus sit si," etc.

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not asked of his ability or his learning, but, as far as human power can do it, his soul is probed as to the reality of his seeking after God and his desire to do the work of God. "To seek after God" is a phrase which may mean very little, may be a commonplace of pious talk; but to the Benedictines it had a tremendous meaning. Here is St. Bernard's[1] explanation of the phrase: "It is to seek nothing else as you seek Him, to seek nothing else besides Him, to seek nothing else after Him." And again, he says: "If we do not wish to seek God fruitlessly, we must seek sincerely, we must seek frequently, we must seek perseveringly. There must be nothing before Him, nothing along with Him. We must not be turned to anything away from Him." Again, "to do the work of God" may mean, does generally mean now, to engage in some of the various activities of parochial life or charitable endeavour. To the Benedictine monk the words had a quite different sense. To be anxious to do the work of God is to "love those things which pertain to God Himself, to wit, prayer and holy reading, watchings by night, the daily course of services, fasting, and every divine office."[2] If the mind of the postulant is set upon

[1] "Non aliud tanquam eum, non aliud praeter eum, non aliud post eum." I have not been able to find these exact words in St. Bernard, but they correspond in substance to the first two chapters of the treatise *De diligendo Deo.* This and the following passage I translated from the Commentary in Migne, *P. L.*, 66.

[2] This is Smaragdus' note on the meaning of the phrase.

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such things as these, then he may listen to the rule, may meditate upon it as upon a path marked out which leads to the attainment of his desires.

So it seems to me that the Benedictine rule was certainly true to the old ascetic ideal of seeking God only without compromise, and literally imitating Christ. If the monks of the order became afterwards colonists, philanthropists, scholars, statesmen, it was not because their rule trained them for such work. They were trained to be good, and nothing more. They sought the kingdom of God and His righteousness. It was not because they pursued them, or laboured for them, or desired them that all the other things were added to them afterwards.

In the same way the rule is true to the other half of the ascetic idea. It is by renunciation of self and the world that God is to be sought. At his profession he renounces all his property. He may give it to the poor or he may make a solemn donation of it to the monastery, but he must keep nothing back for himself.[1] "Indeed he cannot, seeing that he has no longer power even over his own body." "Especially," says the rule, "must the sense of private property be extirpated from the monastery.[2] Let no man presume to give or to receive anything without the command of the abbot. Let no one possess anything of his own, neither book, nor pen,

[1] c. 58. [2] c. 33.

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nor writing tablets; indeed, nothing at all, absolutely nothing (*sed nihil omnino*). So it befits them whose very bodies and wills are not in their own power." No monk, except those specially appointed, is to talk with strangers.[1] If possible, a monk who is sent outside the monastery is not to eat till he returns.[2] He is not, after his return, to talk of what he has seen or heard in the world outside.[3] He is not, without permission, to receive letters from outside.[4] The rule in this way simply works out in detail the ideal of the Antonian asceticism. The world is to be dead to the monk, and he dead to the world.

The position of Benedictine monasticism as a legitimate development of the original ascetic spirit will, perhaps, be made clearer by a comparison between its spirit and that of the Jesuits. In many ways there is a striking resemblance between the two orders. Both were great missionary societies. Both were close allies of the popes. Both have been active in education. Both have affected the history of Europe. Here, however, the resemblance seems to end. The Benedictine order has a record of magnificent success, to which the history of the Jesuits has very little to compare. The nations whom the Benedictine missionaries converted to Christianity have become the foremost nations of the world. The results of the Jesuit missions are

[1] c. 53. [2] c. 51. [3] c. 67. [4] c. 54.

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in comparison insignificant. The Benedictine order raised the Roman Church almost to the sovereignty of the Western world. The Jesuits laboured for the Papacy with unswerving devotion, but it may well be asked whether the position of the Pope in Europe to-day would not be better, instead of worse, if Ignatius Loyola had been killed instead of wounded in the defence of Pampeluna. It was the Benedictine order more than anything which secured the unity of the mediæval Church by winning over to the cause of order the scattered elements of independent Christianity. Must it not be admitted that the Jesuit efforts to restore England to the Roman obedience widened, instead of closing, the breach between the two great Western branches of the Catholic Church? The Benedictines have earned the gratitude of Europe by their labours. They have extorted praise from even the most unwilling lips. The Jesuits have made their name a byword and a reproach. The most detestable charges have been brought against them, and even though such charges may be repeatedly refuted, it seems impossible for the society to altogether clear itself. Let a man read the name Benedictine, and there rise unbidden to his mind great thoughts. He has a vision, perhaps, of stately tomes of Catholic theology, edited, sifted, criticised with a labour that seems incredible. Or he sees a long procession of cowled figures chanting through the cloisters of an abbey,

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and the sweet picture of ungrudged monastic charities. But let him read the name Jesuit, and rightly or wrongly, it will connote to him deceit and craft, unscrupulous intrigue, and disingenuous adaptation of any means for the accomplishment of an end. It may be that the judgment is unjust, but there it is, the impression which three centuries of Jesuit work have left upon the world.

In some ways the comparison is not altogether fair. The lot of the earlier Benedictines fell in more propitious times. In the main the mediæval Papacy represented the side of advance. Ecclesiastical unity was almost a necessity for civilisation struggling out of infancy. Learning and science were in leading strings held by the Church. The monasteries were the centres of light and peace and right. The lot of the Jesuits was a harder one. The Papacy, when they fought for it, was on the side of reaction. Civilisation had long since won its way beyond the Church's lands. Learning had risen like Samson from his sleep, and broken its bonds. Science, in spite of the Church, was opening Nature's book. The part the Jesuits had to play was hard; yet this does not wholly account for the different fame of the orders. A man may fight well, though he fight on the losing side; may gain some honour, since right is seldom altogether on one side.

We must look deeper than the mere outward conditions of the times they lived in, if we are to

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account for the different measure of success and the different meed of fame which has fallen to the two orders. Between the two rules there is a vital and fundamental difference. In each the postulant vowed obedience, poverty, and chastity. In each he renounced the world and its rewards; but the motive was different. The Benedictine renounced in order that he might the better serve God and imitate Christ. The Jesuit renounced that he might become a perfect instrument in the hand of his superior for the service of the society. The Benedictine rule aimed at making good men, and left the question of their usefulness to God. The Jesuit discipline aimed at making men into parts of a great machine. The machine was meant for the service of the Pope. To serve the Pope was assumed to be the same thing as to serve the Church. To serve the Church rightly is to serve God. There are too many links in the chain, too many places where someone may make a mistake. God made men wise enough to see the narrow way that leadeth unto life, and to learn the wayfaring of it in a "*dominici schola servitii*" like that of St. Benedict. He did not make them wise enough to take upon themselves the office of His providence. The Benedictine rule was a legitimate offspring of the old ascetism. It enjoined the renunciation of the world for the sake of Christ. The Jesuit rule was bastard. It taught a renunciation that was complete enough, but it was for the sake of something

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else—something not even necessarily a work of God.

Has this study of monasticism anything more than an antiquarian interest for Churchmen to-day? I have already ventured to suggest how the enthusiasm which created monasticism has its parallels in modern Christianity and how the Anglican Church has mistrusted it and misused it. There remains one point suggestive at least of thought. During the last half-century the Anglican Church has seen revive in her the conception of monastic life. All the experience of the past goes to prove to us how great a part monasticism may play in the Church's life. The ultimate development of our brotherhoods and sisterhoods it is impossible to forecast. History never exactly repeats itself. There is always some forgotten element in the problem which vitiates the wisest calculation of its issue. Yet the broad principles which govern human affairs remain the same, and tend to work towards similar results. If it is true that men in the past became most useful by only trying to be good, is it not likely that the same law may be at work to-day? When men and women bind themselves together to serve the Church, to nurse the sick, to help the poor, to convert the heathen, they are liable to make mistakes, to use means in their blindness which will defeat in the end the very purpose they have at heart. When they join together simply to imitate Christ, they can

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hardly go far wrong upon their way. They need not fear but that God will use them when he wants them. Perhaps it is also a higher ideal to renounce even the satisfaction of usefulness and the glory of service.

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# APPENDICES

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# APPENDIX I

## PRE-CHRISTIAN ASCETICISM AND ITS CONNECTION WITH THE CHRISTIAN MONASTIC LIFE

ALMOST all the great religions of antiquity afford some examples of ascetic practice. In some of them asceticism arrived at a considerable stage of development, and has afforded so many points of resemblance to Christian monasticism that popular writers and loose thinkers have frequently assumed a close connection between them. Four religious systems especially have been credited singly or together with being the parents of Christian monasticism. The Indian ascetics and monks of Brahmanism and Buddhism, the Jewish Essenes and Therapeutae, the mystical philosophers of the later Greek systems, and the "inclusi" of the Egyptian Serapis have all of them been supposed to have set the examples which Christians followed. I have tried to show that Christian monasticism is in reality a development of the ascetic spirit which was present in Christianity from the very first, and that we have no need to wander into the regions of foreign religious thought to account for it. It is entirely unphilosophic to drag in an outside influence to account for an institution which might quite naturally spring from the original principles of the Christian religion itself. It may, however, be useful to examine briefly the asceticism of these four religious systems and to see what grounds there are for supposing them to have been the starting-point of Christian monasticism.



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### I. ASCETICISM IN THE INDIAN RELIGIONS [1]

The religion of the *Rig Vedas*, the earliest Indian religion, was a simple and joyous nature-worship. At what period exactly a change came in its spirit we cannot tell. Somehow the sense of sin laid hold upon the popular conscience. The system of sacrifice introduced by Brahman priests was based on the idea of making expiation for sin. In close connection with the idea of expiatory sacrifice stands the Brahmanic idea of asceticism. The ascetic end of a Brahman's life must be conceived of as a kind of self-sacrifice in expiation for the sins committed while still in connection with the world. The hermit life in woods seems to have been the first kind of distinct ascetic life among the Brahmans, although previous to its development there had come into general practice certain dietary limitations which are based upon an ascetic view of life. Before the days of Buddhism there existed besides the wood hermits some ascetic communities or sects analogous to the later union of ascetics in monasteries. After the rise of Buddhism, Brahman asceticism increased in severity. During the period when Buddhist and Brahman monks contended for the reputation of the highest sanctity, Brahman asceticism grew to be a system of revolting self-torture. The whole conception of it remains that of expiation. The fiercer the ill-treatment of the body, the more complete was the purification of the soul.

Buddhism at first represented a revolt against the physical asceticism of the Brahmans. The great turning-point in Gautama Buddha's own life was his determination to

[1] Most of what I say here about the development of Indian asceticism is taken from Zöckler's study of the subject in *Askese u. Mönchtum*, pp. 34 to 78.

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give up the severely ascetic practices in which he had found neither peace nor illumination. His rule of life is very moderate save in the one point of poverty. This for his monks was almost as complete as it was possible to make it. His moderation did not, however, even at the first commend itself to all his disciples. Sects arose aiming at a more severe asceticism. As the Brahman counter-reformation developed its asceticism and claimed superior sanctity for its hermits, the Buddhist monks found themselves forced into a kind of competition in austerity. They had very early developed a system of monastic life and a strong organisation, as we gather from the fact that a number of general councils of Buddhist monks were held. The Buddhist monks never allowed their asceticism to degenerate into the horrible extremes of the Brahmans. Their underlying conception of the value of the ascetic life was different. For the Brahman it lay in the idea of expiation; for the Buddhist in the hope of rising superior to the bondage of the material world and becoming ultimately absorbed into the purely spiritual Nirvana.

Two points strike the student of Indian asceticism. First, it developed, as it did in Christianity, from practices generally binding, to a severer asceticism in special individuals; and from the detached asceticism of hermits to unions of like-minded individuals in communities. Second, that the ascetic idea formed no part of the original religious tradition, but developed as thought deepened and spirituality increased.



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## 2. ASCETICISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND AMONG THE JEWS

The basal conception of the Old Testament religion is absolutely different from that of the Indians. It started from a monotheistic conception of the Deity equally opposed to polytheism and to a dualistic conception of the universe.

In the patriarchal period there seems to have been no idea of asceticism at all. The favour of God is intimately connected with the earthly prosperity of the righteous man. The psalms which describe the righteous as blessed with strong sons, and daughters beautiful as polished stones, which endow God's chosen with sheep that bring forth thousands and ten thousands, with fields that laugh and sing in harvest gladness, are true to the oldest religious ideas of the patriarchal period. Even the rite of circumcision, in which later Jews[1] saw a symbolic renunciation of the lusts of the flesh, had probably at first a quite opposite meaning.[2]

The same general idea of religion prevailed during the Mosaic period. The earth was the Lord's and the fulness thereof. God's people looked forward to prosperity and plenty in a land that flowed with milk and honey. In opposition to this authorised conception, the popular conscience seems to have demanded recognition for certain vows, like that of the Nazarites, which were based upon an ascetic idea.[3] In this period, too, the idea of sexual

[1] See Philo's essay on Circumcision.

[2] There seems to be no agreement among students of sociology as to the original idea of the rite. The theory that it was a sanitary regulation must be given up. Perhaps Westermarck's guess, in the *History of Human Marriage*, is as good as any.

[3] Num. vi. ; cf. xxx.

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relationship involving necessarily a certain unholiness appeared for the first time.[1]

In the age of the Judges and Kings this idea persisted and developed.[2] The schools of the prophets founded by Samuel must have had some ascetic tinge in their religion. They may have been the spiritual ancestors of the great ascetic prophet Elijah, to whom the Christian monks looked back as their prototype. The Rechabites, who are praised by Jeremiah, were an ascetic sect.[3]

The exilic period brought a development of the ascetic side of religion. The great affliction of captivity found a natural expression in new fasts, like that of Purim.[4] The second Isaiah's great conception of the suffering servant of Jehovah disturbed the very base of the old belief in the close connection between righteousness and earthly happiness.

Thus the way was prepared for the asceticism of the post-exilic period. The Pharisees, with their two fasts in the week and their scrupulous care about legal cleanness, had as their rivals a truly ascetic sect. The origin of the Essenes is involved in obscurity.[5] The extent to which their peculiarities were due to foreign influences has been discussed, but without justifying a definite conclusion. Their view of marriage and their fasting stamp them as an ascetic sect. Their system, however it may have been enriched with details borrowed from Hellenistic sources, was essentially a growth from Judaism. The Therapeutae[6] were another post-exilic sect, and must be regarded as quite distinct from the Essenes. They afford an almost perfect type of ascetic community life.

[1] Exod. xix. 15; Lev. xv. 17 and ff.
[2] 1 Sam. xxi. 5; 2 Sam. xi. 10.
[3] Jer. xxxv. 1.
[4] Esther ix. 32.
[5] See Lightfoot's essay.
[6] See Philo's *De Vitâ Contemplivâ* and Conybeare's notes on it.

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Thus the history of the chosen people affords us another example of the growth of the ascetic idea in a religion originally not only without asceticism, but fundamentally opposed to it. The multitudinous descendants of the patriarch, the flocks and corn fields of the righteous, the inheritance of the land of milk and honey—these are the original ideas of what God desires for men. Yet this religion found at last an expression in a sect of celibate monks who had renounced their property.

### 3. ASCETICISM AMONG THE GREEKS

The Greek religion, like the Indian, was originally a nature-worship. Its development, however, followed entirely different lines. Strictly speaking, there was for a long time no *religious* development among the Greeks. The ancient myths about half-human divinities remained in the background of the national consciousness. They were neither intellectually interpreted nor spiritually developed. Two faculties sprang into prominence in Greek life, to the exclusion of the instinct for religion. The artistic appreciation of the beautiful found a substitute for gods in the heroes of athletic contests, or realised the divinities of the old myths in artistic forms which appealed to the æsthetic, but scarcely to the religious emotions. The intellectual Greeks left the religious myths alone, and occupied themselves in trying to establish theories of nature and the universe. Mental activity was energetic in the pursuit of a rational basis of philosophy, and suffered no interruption from the revelations of prophets. Rival philosophic schools disputed instead of rival religious sects. Asceticism is very little akin to either the æsthetic instinct or purely rational thought. The ascetic sees or strains to see God. The artist sees man and the world.

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The early Greek philosophers looked calmly and rationally at nature. In Greek philosophy, therefore, of the pre-Socratic period we find little or no trace of asceticism. "The way of life of Pythagoras"[1] is possibly an exception, but his teaching had little or no influence on early Greek thought.

The influence of Socrates and Plato turned thought from physics to ethics. Their method was still rational, and asceticism found no place in their systems. Even Plato, who came nearest of Greek thinkers up to his time to being religious, made little appeal to the conscience of the individual, and did not inspire an enthusiasm for knowing God. The change in the direction of thought produced a certain effect. The Stoics, who devoted themselves to ethics more completely and successfully than any of their predecessors, cannot be called an ascetic school. They lacked the mysticism without which asceticism can scarcely find a place in life. Nevertheless, in the writings of the later Stoics we find thought which very nearly approaches to the ascetic idea of life.

Greek philosophy did not remain permanently a stranger to religious mysticism. The Neo-Pythagoreans set the example which the Neo-Platonists followed of falling back from the purely rational upon a religious and mystical conception of the world. The old myths, which had remained fossilised in the national literature, were wakened into life, allegorised, spiritualised. A philosophic basis was found for asceticism.

The religion which began by deifying Hercules spoke its last word in Porphyry's *De Abstinentia*. The divine, which had once sported through Homer's tales joyfully irresponsible in the sunshine, was recognised to be dimly

[1] Plat., *Rep.*, x. 600.

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apprehensible only through the intuition of a soul that is passive, and the children of the men who contested the Olympic games felt the intolerable weight of bodily desire, and strove through fast and abstinence to loose the knot which bound them to the flesh.

### 4. ASCETICISM IN EGYPT[1]

The ancient religion of the Egyptians was not ascetic. In spite of a tendency to meditate upon the condition of the dead, the early Egyptian life seems to have been cheerful, and even childlike. The people rejoiced in the pomp of religious ceremonials. Their morality was natural and human. Excesses were forbidden, but no violent self-restraint was practised by either priests or people. Occasional fasts were ordained, but sexual asceticism was unknown.

At the time of the Ptolomaic rule we find that a great change had passed over the national religion. It had become gloomy and severe. Men were found willing to dedicate themselves to a perpetual imprisonment in the temple of Serapis at Memphis. These "inclusi" lived in tiny cells, and led lives of the severest asceticism, in honour of their goddess. So far had the ascetic spirit laid hold upon the popular mind that the "inclusi" were objects of the greatest veneration and respect.

The very slight sketch which I have been able to give of the history of asceticism in these four pre-Christian religions suggests an interesting and curious line of thought. Asceticism, it appears, is not an element in the simplest and most primitive religions. It does, however, tend to

[1] See Amélineau's *Hist. of Egyptian Moral Ideas*, and Zöckler, *Askese u. Mönchtum*, pp. 94–7.

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appear, indeed invariably appears, when religion develops out of its earliest stage into a system of belief in the divine which seriously affects human conduct. A very much wider and more careful study of religion from this point of view would be necessary to establish with any kind of certainty what I have suggested about the relation of asceticism to religion. If, however, asceticism should prove to be, like sacrifice and prayer, part of the human religious instinct, although appearing only when the instinct has developed a system, it would clearly be a fact of great importance to the student of Christian monasticism. It would appear, then, that since Christianity is the most highly developed and the most spiritual of all religions, asceticism might be expected, *a priori*, to find in Christianity its most perfect expression. Sacrifice is perfected in Christianity. Prayer has reached its highest expression in Christianity. All that other religions knew and felt about prayer and sacrifice has been gathered together, illuminated, and intensified in Christ. It is at least possible that the ascetic instinct may be a younger sister of those which lead men to sacrifice and pray, and that we might expect to find, that which indeed we do find, that it has its true home in the Church and its long-desired point of attachment to the divine in the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief.

This is a mere speculation, which may possibly be a fruitful source of thought, but to which I have no wish to attach any weight in trying to estimate what, if anything, Christian monasticism owes to any of these religions.

In approaching this subject I must point out, in the first place, that there is no possibility of tracing the passage of the ascetic idea from one religion to another. The case of the asceticism of the later Greek philosophers is a possible

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exception, but even in the case of the Greeks a fuller investigation would show that the germs of an ascetic development were present from very early times. It certainly cannot be supposed that the Buddhists taught the Egyptians or the Jews to take an ascetic view of life. No tradition of any great missionary of asceticism exists. If we go further afield and note the ascetic practices of great religions in regions which preclude the possibility of derivation from a common source—such as the religions of Peru and Mexico—we are strengthened in the belief that the universality of asceticism is not due to the influence of any one religion upon others, but is a proof of its natural and spontaneous growth. If asceticism came into existence independently in Judaism, Hindooism, the religions of Egypt, Babylonia, Rome, Peru, Mexico, and other places, there is at least nothing unnatural in supposing it to have been also a spontaneous growth in Christianity.

I have never met with any attempt to trace in detail the supposed connection between Buddhist asceticism and Christian monasticism. It seems, however, to be generally supposed that the attempt has been made, and made successfully. The casual references to monasticism as a realisation in Christianity of Buddhist conceptions, which are made, very light-heartedly, by preachers and essayists, do not seem to be based upon any historical study whatever.

The early fathers seem to have known very little about Indian religions.[1] When they allude to them at all it is in a confused and inaccurate manner. They view them as a rule with hostility, mingled with contempt, and are most careful to point out that the asceticism of the Church is

[1] See Lightfoot's *Essay on the Essenes*, pp. 381 and ff.

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something entirely different from that of Buddhists or Brahmans. When the Church developed for itself a distinct ascetic life, it by no means began where the Indian religions left off. Had the Christian ascetics been mere copyists of the Buddhists, they would have entered at once upon a fully organised system of monasticism instead of fighting their way upwards, as the Buddhists had already done, through the lower stages of monastic evolution. Had the Christianity of the Church been seriously touched with the Brahman spirit, there would almost certainly have appeared along with the asceticism some traces of the caste system. But the idea of caste was entirely absent from Catholic ascetic life. The movement towards monasticism in Egypt was a purely popular one. In the organised Benedictine monasteries of the West it shows a spirit absolutely opposed to the idea of a privileged class. In the monasteries alone in the Middle Ages was there a career open to talent and a complete disregard of the claims of birth.

Brahmanism and Christianity did meet and interact in one eclectic sect. There is no doubt that the Manichæans drew much of their peculiar religious teaching from Indian sources. Their asceticism was Indian and not Christian in its origin and ideals. We find in it a distinction among believers analogous to the caste system. When, as in the case of the Euchite sect in Asia Minor, Manichæan asceticism found a popular expression, it developed a kind of life which was quickly recognised as quite different from that of even the most fanatical Christian monks.

We may safely conclude that Indian religions in no way affected the development of Catholic asceticism. There is no evidence that they did. There is some evidence that they did not. There is a strong presumption against their

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having done so, because Manichæan asceticism, the offspring of a union between Christian and Indian religious thought, is absolutely different from anything we know of in the history of Catholic monasticism.

The asceticism of the Old Testament exercised a certain influence on the growth of Christian monasticism. The early literature of the movement abounds in references to Elijah as a great type of the ascetic life. Cassian refers to him more than once.[1] St. Jerome quotes not only Elijah's life, but Elisha's, and certain incidents in the histories of Adam, Moses, Hezekiah, and others as precedents for Christian ascetic practices.[2] He refers to those who wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins, of whom the world was not worthy, as the forerunners of the monks.

We have, too, a series of references to the sect of the Therapeutae, in which their community life is regarded as an early example of Christian monasticism. Eusebius is the first who fell into this mistake. He is followed by Cassian and Jerome.[3]

I am convinced, however, that the impulse which sent the early hermits into the wilderness did not come from a desire to imitate either Elijah or John the Baptist. Their asceticism was found afterwards convenient for quotation where scriptural examples of the hermit life were required for controversial purposes,[4] or for confirming the purpose of the monks.[5] There is no evidence whatever that any of the early hermits set out with the intention of imitating these Old Testament saints. The influence of such ascetic practices as can be quoted from the Old Testament lay

[1] *e.g. Conf.*, xviii. 6. [2] *Adv. Jovinian.*, ii.

[3] Cass., *Inst.*, ii. 5; St. Jer., *De Vir. Illustr.*, i. 11; and Soz., *H.E.*, i. 12.

[4] As by St. Jerome. [5] As by Cassian.

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solely in justifying, not at all in inspiring, Christian monasticism. The Abbot Piamun,[1] who quotes the examples of Elijah and John the Baptist, recognises first that Paul and St. Antony were the true founders of the anchorite life. He only notes as an interesting historical parallel the resemblance of their way of life to that of Elijah. St. Jerome quotes his long list of Old Testament ascetics for controversial purposes. He is bent upon demonstrating against Jovinianus that the ascetic life is divinely recognised as a superior one.

The question of the influence of the example set by the Therapeutae, on the development of Christian monasticism, is a more difficult one. The fathers who followed Eusebius were under the impression that the Therapeutae were a very early order of Christian monks. This, as we know, was a mistake; but it was a mistake which may have helped towards the formation of Christian ascetic communities. The conviction that the earliest converts of St. Mark in Egypt were a community of monks and nuns would certainly afford a powerful motive for imitation. It would, however, be very easy to exaggerate the influence of this mistake. The Therapeutae were gathered into an organised community. The earliest Christian monks were not. Whatever, then, may have been the influence of the Therapeutae over later Christian monasticism, they certainly did not afford an example which St. Antony imitated. Again, the Therapeutae included both men and women in the same community. The earliest Christian monasteries were for men only and women only, and intercourse between monks and nuns was carefully and severely restricted.[2] Other

[1] Cass., *Conf.*, xviii.

[2] The first who introduced double monasteries for both men and women was St. Basil.

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differences between the Jewish sect and the Christian monks are so striking and numerous that it is impossible to believe that the founders of the early monasteries tried to reproduce the life described in the *De Vitâ Contemplivâ*. The influence which, through Eusebius' mistake, the example of the Therapeutae exercised over Christian monasticism must have been confined to its affording a comfortable assurance that the monks really were returning to the oldest apostolic Christian way of life.

The theory that Christian monasticism owes its origin to the introduction of Neo-Platonic speculation into Christian thought, I have already briefly discussed (chap. iii.). It will be sufficient here to merely notice the following considerations: 1. Neo-Platonism influenced Christian thought through the writings of Origen. 2. Origen cannot be thought of as having given its original impulse to the monastic movement, because the earliest monks were not the kind of men who speculated or philosophised. 3. Origen's teaching did produce a certain kind of monasticism, that, for instance, of Hierakas; but this monasticism did not contain any vital principle. It vanished, without influencing one way or the other the growth of the really Christian systems of ascetic life. 4. Origen's philosophy was used afterwards by apologists for Christian monasticism. His arguments were repeated; his phrases quoted. The titles which he applied to the ascetic life passed into general use.

I conceive Origen's Neo-Platonism to have played in the history of Christian monasticism very much the part which the philosophy of Diderot, D'Alembert, and J. J. Rousseau did in the French Revolution. Monasticism and the revolution were both great popular movements. Philosophies may prepare the way for such movements. They

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do not create them. If the French peasants had not been half starved and more than half enslaved, the philosophy of the eighteenth century might have quietly mouldered in its encyclopedia. It was a thirst for vengeance and not a philosophic admiration for its contents which led men to bind Rousseau's book in the skins of aristocrats. The men who worshipped the goddess of Reason upon a Christian altar did so because their new deity seemed to have justified the deeds that hunger and hatred prompted.

The connection between Christian Platonism and monasticism is similar. Forgotten ascetics like Piereus and Hierakas might have endeavoured to follow a philosophic way of life, but if there had not been in Christianity a principle which drove men to the pursuit of perfect righteousness, no philosophy could have peopled the deserts with hermits or studded Europe with monastic settlements.

The most detailed and carefully worked-out attempt to trace Christian monasticism to a foreign source is Weingarten's theory that the early monks simply copied the lives of the "inclusi" of the Egyptian goddess Serapis. The *Ursprung des Mönchtum* and the article "Mönchtum" in the second edition of the *P. R. E.* contain the arguments on which Weingarten bases his theory. He has been followed in his conclusions by one or two English writers—as, for instance, Gwatkin and Farrar—but nothing has been added in the way of evidence to what he originally put forward.

He sets out with the assumption that monasticism was unknown in the Church up the year 340 A.D. It may be gathered from this statement that his whole scheme of chronology is absolutely revolutionary. I am not inclined to enter into a detailed criticism of it. The work has been

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well done, and Weingarten's fundamental assumption absolutely disproved by Zöckler, Dom Butler, and others.

Weingarten's criticism of the value of the early works bearing on Christian monasticism is as radical and as unsatisfactory as his chronology. He not only sweeps away as worthless such works as the *Vita Antonii* and the *Lausiac History*, but he ignores the homilies of Aphraat and the whole cycle of Coptic monastic literature. I hope to show (Appendix ii.) that recent criticism goes far to establish the reliability of most of the sources of our knowledge of early monasticism, and so need not open the subject here.

A few words ought to be added with reference to the constructive part of Weingarten's work. He believes that certain Egyptian peasants—on the point of the peasant origin of monasticism Weingarten is definite—took it into their heads to imitate the lives of the "inclusi" of Serapis. They had no great temples into which they might build themselves, so they adopted as an alternative retirement to the wilderness.

It is perfectly true that these monks of Serapis really existed. It is most likely that Christians knew about them and were familiar with the esteem in which they were generally held by the heathen people. It is possible that, previous to conversion, some Christians—for instance, St. Pachomius—may have come under the influence of the priests of Serapis, and even served an apprenticeship to the monasticism of the Serapeum. So far we can go with Weingarten, but when he passes on to assume as quite natural that Christians imitated this heathen life, we are obliged to pause and ask: Why should they? Is it a sufficient way of accounting for the existence of a practice in a certain religion to demonstrate that it existed somewhere

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else before? I find it very difficult to believe that men *must* imitate whatever they see others doing, whether pleasant or unpleasant. If the monasticism of the Serapeum had been a pleasant or a charming pagan rite, it is intelligible enough that ignorant Christian peasants might want to incorporate it into their religion. When we are told, for instance, that a great deal of the mediæval saint-worship was merely pagan devotion to local divinities, disguised with a thin veneer of Christianity, we find no great obstacle to believing it. It was natural enough that a population still half heathen should desire to retain the quaint and picturesque devotions of their fathers. But this matter of the severe asceticism of the monks of Serapis is entirely different. Assuming—and the assumption underlies Weingarten's whole argument — that the ascetic spirit is entirely absent from the original Christian teaching, what was there to induce Christian peasants to turn hermits? The impulse did not come, according to Weingarten, from the gospel. It is certainly not inherent in the physical nature of man. He loves to lie soft and warm and eat to the full.

Weingarten faces this question honestly enough, but his answer is amazingly unsatisfactory. The monks of Serapis, he says, were greatly admired by the people. They were fed by the offerings of the faithful. They did no work. The Christian peasant also wished to be admired, to be fed by other people, and to be lazy. Therefore the Christian peasant set himself to imitate the monk of Serapis and became a hermit.

The case of these hermits has been a hard one. On the one side they are abused for their self-abasement and their austerity. On the other side they are accused of vanity, gluttony, and idleness. Indeed, Weingarten himself brings

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both charges against them, apparently without realising that they are mutually destructive.

It is only by excluding from consideration all the documents from which we derive our knowledge of the early monks that it is possible to entertain such an estimate of their character. The true answer to such a theory is simply to look at the facts of the case. The *Vita Antonii*, the *Lausiac History*, and the rest, do not record the lives of vain, selfish, lazy men. The heroes of early monasticism may have been fools, but at least they were fools who gave all that men can give and gained nothing that most men care to gain. If they were applauded, they never heard the applause. They fled from the breath of it, as from a plague.

Altogether apart from the character of the men, is it likely that early monasticism was half pagan? And yet, on Weingarten's hypothesis, this is what it must have been, since it was an importation into Christianity not only of practices, but of a great principle which was altogether foreign to the gospel. The early monks were enthusiastic missionaries. They even attacked paganism fiercely and fanatically. Can they have been at the same time in full sympathy with a purely pagan ideal?

To the student who has determined to view history largely, and to regard facts apart from any party standpoint, there is something profoundly disquieting in the various attempts to trace back monasticism to some strange influence foreign to the gospel. The Church in history has been bound up with monasticism. There are periods when but for the monks spirituality would have died out of the Church; when it seems as if, but for the monks, Christianity itself, even the name of it, would have vanished.

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The faith has been propagated mainly by monks. Very much of the good that the Church has effected has been through monasticism. If monasticism be indeed based on some heathen addition to the spirit of the gospel, a doubt will inevitably take hold upon the mind. Christianity owes much to this heathen addition to the original faith of the gospel. Then the gospel cannot be what we believed it, the one complete and self-sufficient revelation of the will of God. It has required the help of this spirit of asceticism to maintain its place and its growth in the world. It has needed to be supplemented from without—from India, from Greece, from Egypt, it matters not whence the addition came. The course of history shows that monasticism was useful to the Church, nay, necessary to the Church. Yet it is not of the gospel. The conclusion is most disquieting. The gospel is therefore only a fragment of a revelation scattered among all nations everywhere. It may contain a little good, much good, more good than any other religious teaching, but, since it needs to borrow, it does not contain all good. So its claim to be the perfect revelation fails.



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## APPENDIX II

### ON THE VALUE OF THE SOURCES OF EARLY EGYPTIAN MONASTIC HISTORY MADE USE OF IN CHAPTERS IV. AND V.

OUR knowledge of fourth-century Egyptian monasticism is derived mainly from the following sources:—

I. The *Vita Antonii*, attributed to St. Athanasius.
II. The *Historia Monachorum*, attributed to Rufinus.
III. The *Lausiac History* of Palladius.
IV. The *Conferences* of Cassian.
V. The various collections of *Apophthegmata Patrum*.

All these works have been published in Latin with valuable notes and prolegomena by Rosweyd, in his *Vitae Patrum*. Most of them are to be found in volumes 73 and 74 of Migne's *Patrologia Latina*. English translations of the *Vita Antonii* and of Cassian's *Conferences* have been published in the Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Every one of these works has excited grave critical distrust, and it has seemed to me necessary to append to my chapter on St. Antony and his disciples a short summary of recent criticism, adding occasionally considerations which seem to me to be of weight in determining their value as sources of history.

I. First, in the date of its composition and in the date of



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the events with which it deals, comes the *Vita Antonii*. It is a matter of primary importance to determine whether this work is to be regarded as history or romance.

A. If we were sure that St. Athanasius was the author, we should at once, I think, have a strong argument in favour of the historicity of the work. Now the external evidence of the Athanasian authorship is remarkably strong. A translation was made of it during the lifetime of Athanasius by Evagrius, a Eustathian presbyter. Ephrem Syrus,[1] who died in 373, attributes the *Vita* to Athanasius. So does Gregory Nazian[2] in 380, and Rufinus[3] in 400. In the fifth century there is a steady tradition of the Athanasian authorship. A convincing summary of this external evidence has been compiled by Dr. Archibald Robertson, and printed in the Introduction to his translation of the *Vita*. Among recent critics, Zöckler[4] and Dom Cuthbert Butler[5] decide in favour of the Athanasian authorship.

B. Even if we remain undecided on the question of the authorship of the book, we may still be led by consideration of the narrative itself to settle whether we are to regard it as history or romance.

1. There are several examples of Christian romances written with the intention of recommending and glorifying monasticism. For instance, St. Jerome's *Vita Pauli* must be regarded as such a romance, although very probably it had as a foundation a real Paul. St. Jerome does not seem to claim more for his book than that it had a

[1] *Opp.*, ed. 1732–43, i. p. 249.
[2] *Or.*, 21, 5.
[3] Rufinus, *H.E.*, i. 8.
[4] *Askese und Mönchtum*, pp. 188 and ff.
[5] Prolegomena to *Hist. Laus.*, 226–7.

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foundation in fact. Amélineau has published another such romance under the title, *Voyage d'un moine égyptien dans le désert.* The author Paphnutius seems to have been a prolific writer of romances.[1] Here, again, I am inclined to think that at least that portion of the romance published in Rosweyd, under the name *Vita Onuphrii*, had a solid foundation in fact. Is the *Vita Antonii* to be placed in the same category as works like these? To do so would, it seems to me, be impossible for a literary critic. Anyone who reads the *Vita Pauli* and then the *Vita Antonii* cannot fail to be struck by the absolutely different literary flavour of the works. There is in St. Jerome's work a recognisable effort after dramatic effect, and a deliberate appreciation of the picturesque, which is entirely absent from the *Vita Antonii.* I can quite imagine that the ordinary patron of a circulating library would find the *Vita Pauli* an interesting story, and lay down the *Vita Antonii* as extremely dull. The two resemble each other no more than *Woodstock* does the *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson.*

2. Nor is the distinction between them that which separates a good from a bad novel. If the *Vita Antonii* is a novel at all, it is a remarkably good novel, for it portrays a very many-sided, and at the same time a perfectly self-consistent character. I have already pointed out (chap. iv.) the remarkable balance of the saint's character. A novelist, especially a novelist with a purpose, would almost certainly have emphasised the enthusiasm of his hero to the exclusion of his less dramatic moderation. For a full and able discussion of the character of St. Antony I refer the reader to Newman's two essays in the

[1] Amélineau, *Contes et Romans de l'Égypt Chrétienne*, Introduction, p. xl.

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*Church of the Fathers.* Any elaboration on my part of the argument I indicate would merely result in a repetition of what he has said.

3. Dom Cuthbert Butler, in his Prolegomena to the *Lausiac History*, has published a collection of testimonies to the reality of St. Antony from sources independent of the *Vita*. It is wholly impossible to suppose that the hero of a novel, however splendidly conceived, could have so impressed the minds of the next generation as to induce men to regard him as a real person.

4. The stories which are told elsewhere of St. Antony's sayings and doings are consistent with the character drawn in the *Vita*. The Antony of the *Vita* is the same man as the Antony who emerges here and there in the *Apophthegmata* as the author of an aphorism or the teacher of a truth.

II. The *Historia Monachorum* is the account of a tour made through the monastic settlements in Egypt in the years 394–5 by a party of seven, one of whom is the writer of the book. It has been traditionally attributed to Rufinus, but there are good reasons for doubting that he was the author. Three theories about the authorship have recently been put forward.

1. Preuschen (*Palladius u. Rufinus*) supposes that the book was originally written in Latin by Rufinus in or about the year 405. Rufinus was in Egypt in 375, and again in 385, but, as Tillemont points out, he cannot have been there in 394. Preuschen supposes that, working upon his recollections of the monks he knew during his visits to Egypt, he set himself to construct the conditions which prevailed ten or twenty years later. It seems natural to ask why, if Rufinus wanted to describe the monks at any particular fixed date, he settled upon 394 in preference to any

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other? It certainly seems an arbitrary and rather senseless thing for a man to do.

2. Zöckler (*Askese u. Mönchtum*)[1] has revived the theory, originally put forward by Tillemont, that the journey was actually made by Petronius, who furnished Rufinus with the notes of his recollections. These notes Rufinus, with the help of the lost writings of Timotheus of Alexandria, worked up into the *Historia* which we possess.

3. Dom Cuthbert Butler, in his Prolegomena to the *Lausiac History*,[2] argues that the original language of the book is Greek, and not Latin. He regards Rufinus as the translator, and not the author. It seems to me that he has proved this point. If so, the hypotheses of Preuschen and Tillemont become inadmissible, and we are thrown back upon the supposition that the journey was made by a party of Greek-speaking tourists, of whom we know nothing. Butler suggests[3] that one of them, and he the author of the book, was Timotheus, Archdeacon of Alexandria. He calls this a "mere conjecture," and adds that he attaches no importance to it. It is certainly a very brilliant suggestion, and serves to explain[4] the clearly erroneous statement of Sozomen, that the author of the *Historia* was Timotheus, the Archbishop of Alexandria.

On any of the three theories the *Historia Monachorum* must be regarded as substantially a reliable first-hand account of the men and times it describes. Zöckler[5] is most careful to emphasise its freshness and the obvious traces of personal observation which abound in it. The net result of recent criticism has been to entirely justify the use of this work as a source of monastic history.

III. With regard to the *Lausiac History* of Palladius,

[1] pp. 212 and ff. [2] pp. 257 and ff.
[3] As above, p. 276. [4] *H.E.*, vi. 29. [5] As before.

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I am not inclined to quote any criticism earlier than that of Dom Cuthbert Butler. All other criticism is based on the supposition that the work ordinarily known as the *Lausiac History*, and printed under this title in Rosweyd (Book viii.), is to be treated as what Zöckler calls the "canonical Palladius." This work contains a great deal of the same matter as the *Historia Monachorum*, and is confused and inconsistent in the accounts it gives of some of the monks. Butler advances the theory that this book is in reality the work of a compiler who blended together, often unskilfully, the original work of Palladius and the *Historia Monachorum*. The real work of Palladius, according to this theory, is what has been long known as the *Paradisus Heraclidis*, which other critics, *e.g.* Zöckler, imagined to be a condensed edition of the *History*. It would be impertinent, as well as unnecessary, for me to attempt to give a summary of the arguments with which Butler supports his theory. I merely wish to add that I accept his reasoning as conclusive, and recognise here, as in the case of the *Historia Monachorum*, the debt which all students of monastic origins owe to his brilliant scholarship.

On the whole, it is probable that no critic, unless, like Weingarten, he was anxious to support a preconceived theory of monastic origins, would have hesitated to recognise the historicity of these three works were it not for one great objection which applies to all of them. They all relate miraculous events. Two of them, the *Historia Monachorum* and the *Lausiac History*, abound in miracles of the most startling kind. This is the real ground for the general distrust of these works. I think it is an objection which must be fairly faced.

It seems to me quite useless to attempt to minimise or explain the miracles in the *Historia Monachorum* or the

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*Lausiac History*. A careful criticism of the text may succeed in getting rid of a few. The advance of scientific knowledge of obscure or pathological mental phenomena may teach us to recognise as natural many cases of vision and clairvoyance. But, when all that can possibly be expected has been done along these lines, there will remain untouched a solid substratum of inexplicable miracles. Nor does it seem altogether to the point to claim that all history is more or less built upon documents which relate miracles. This may be true, and it is fair enough to compare the *Vita Antonii* with, for instance, Gregory the Great's *Life of St. Benedict*, and to insist that, so far as the miraculous elements in them are concerned, the two biographies must stand or fall together. But the case is different with the other two books under discussion. I do not know any other books, recognised as trustworthy sources of history, which can compare with the *Historia Monachorum* and the *Lausiac History* in the number and surprising nature of the miracles related. Are we bound, then, on account of their miracles to relegate these two works to the region of fairy tales? This is what Weingarten does. I believe it to be a wholly unphilosophical proceeding. To dismiss a work written in Egypt at the beginning of the fifth century as unhistorical because it fails to satisfy the cross-examination of a modern European is really no less absurd than it would be to take a Central African negro potentate into a London drawing-room, and then decide that he cannot be a king in his own country because he does not behave himself in society as Edward VII. does. Regard must be had to the purpose, time, and place of writing before we venture to pronounce upon the worth of a book.

Egypt in the fourth and fifth centuries was the home

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of miracle and romance. When we read the native Coptic biographies, like the *Life of Schnoudi*, by his disciple Visa, the miracles of the histories we are discussing pale into insignificance. The Coptic writer positively revels in the miraculous. The miracle itself may be grotesque, the circumstances which occasion it utterly unworthy of a special intervention of Providence, but the narrator never hesitates. He plunges boldly on, and if one miracle will not achieve the object he has in view, he adds more with a liberal hand. Amélineau,[1] who is probably the greatest modern authority on Christian Egypt, writes of Coptic literature:—"En Orient quand on fait si bien que d'ajouter foi aux récits merveilleux, ce qui ne manque jamais d'arriver, on le fait sans aucun restriction; la raison disparaît complétement; en Occident au contraire, même dans les récits le plus extraordinaires, la raison n'abdique pas son entière indépendence et fait quelque restriction, soit dans certaines explications, soit dans certaines circonstances du récit. La raison en est que nous suivons le récit, et que nous ne le devançons pas, comme on le fait en Orient. En Occident l'annonce du merveilleux nous mets de suite sur nos gardes; en Orient le simple énoncé d'un fait, sans la moindre de ses circonstances miraculeuses, fait pâmer d'aise tous les auditeurs. Il nous faut des raisons pour admettre un miracle; pour eux, étant admis que Dieu est tout-puissant, il n'y a plus aucune raison de douter que tel ou tel fait prodigieux ait eu lieu."

Now Palladius and the author of the *Historia Monachorum* were not Copts, which accounts for their comparative economy in the matter of miracles—an economy comparative to the genuine extravagance, for instance, of Visa. They were, however, in full sympathy with the

[1] Introduction to *Vit. de Schnoudi*, pp. 60, 61.

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Coptic monks among whom they resided. They listened to the stories the monks told them. They admired and venerated the tellers. They appreciated the moral miracles of the lives they saw, until the physical miracles ceased to be, if they ever were, incredible. They lingered amid the solitary rocks and barren wastes, where God was all and the world outside forgotten. They learned to watch for the subtle snares of fiends and to listen for the divine voice, until all the vast system of accustomed things to whose unaltering sequence we have given the name of law seemed nothing to them They expected miracles, and they beheld miracles. We cannot wonder. What else should we expect? So far, then, from the presence of the miraculous in these narratives being a reason for accounting them spurious—romances, fairy tales—we may fairly say that the absence of the miraculous would be a reason for rejecting them. An account of the Egyptian monks, containing no miracles, would, if such a thing existed, have to be reckoned as the product of some later age, some other land, or at best of some quite unsympathetic mind. Our histories may be reckoned genuine, what they profess to be, the work of men who knew and loved the desert fathers, chiefly because they faithfully reflect the spirit of the Coptic Christian. The truly philosophic critic will be ready to study and learn from these works because, and not in spite of, the profusion of miracles they contain.

IV. Cassian's *Conferencës* profess to be the record of a series of interviews which Cassian had with monks in Lower Egypt, especially those of the Nile Delta. It is a work of a different kind from the *Historia Monachorum* or the *Lausiac History*. We miss at once the fresh spontaneity of the former works. There is evidence of literary effort,

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of careful classification, and here and there of a desire to support a special set of theological opinions with the authority of the Egyptian saints. At the same time, the artificiality of the work is not such as would lead us to regard the whole as an effort of literary imagination. Certain scenes have so impressed themselves upon the writer's memory that he is able even after a lapse of years to relate them in vivid detail. The weird descriptions of scenery in the Nile Delta can only come from the pen of one who had gazed on what he describes. The arrangement and classification which form so striking a contrast to the undigested memoranda of Palladius are no more than we might expect in a book of travels written by a man of literary talent. Nor can the Pelagian language of the thirteenth conference be urged against the reality of the interview described. The language may be that of the controversy, while the sentiments were really those of the Lower Egyptian monks. There are anecdotes of monks which could scarcely have been invented by anyone unfamiliar with Egyptian monasticism. On the whole, we may safely accept the opinion of Dr. Gibson, in the Introduction to his English translation of the *Conferences*, that the work gives us a substantially true picture of the life it professes to describe. We may supplement this judgment with the remark of Zöckler,[1] that the *Conferences* are valuable for the light they throw upon the spirit of the movement rather than for the information they give about its external history.

V. The *Apophthegmata Patrum* consist of a number of isolated anecdotes and aphorisms, some bearing the names of well-known Egyptian fathers, and some anonymous. Weingarten[2] regards them as the composition of a Greek

[1] As above. [2] *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums.*

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author of a later century. This is almost manifestly an absurd position and the result of his unfortunate prejudice against the monks. Zöckler[1] dismisses them with a brief but suggestive note as a late and in some parts apocryphal compilation, but one possessing individual points of interest. Dom Butler[2] makes an investigation which leads him to the following conclusions:—

1. Apophthegmata were current in Egypt as isolated anecdotes during the second half of the fourth century.

2. Groups of these were in process of formation during the first half of the fifth century.

3. Great collections of them were made towards the close of the fifth century.

He concludes: "Without for a moment questioning that there are apocryphal additions, I believe that on the whole the Apophthegmata are substantially genuine, and represent the ideas and the teaching of those to whom they are attributed, and that therefore they are a true record of Egyptian monachism."

I do not see how anyone can doubt that this is in the main a true account of the origin of these collections, unless, indeed, a man who is so convinced of the degradation of Egyptian monasticism that he cannot think of its producing works of such spiritual beauty. I do not, however, understand why it is necessary to fix the beginnings of the circulation of isolated anecdotes at the middle of the fourth century. From what we know of the habits of the hermits and monks, it seems probable that as soon as they had any intercourse with each other they related stories of the sayings and doings of favourite heroes. It is not

[1] As above. [2] As above, pp. 213, 214.

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likely, for instance, that none of the anecdotes about St. Antony were related until after his death. On the contrary, certainly most of these, and probably others among those now anonymous, were in circulation during the first half of the fourth century. For the determination of the age of any particular anecdote we are, of course, thrown back upon such evidence as is afforded by its contents. This is certainly not satisfactory, and yet it is possible that here and there scraps of information may be unearthed about the oldest and darkest period of the movement. It is this possibility which gives the Apophthegmata a quite unique value to the historical student. It is possible through them to penetrate to the ideas of a period of which Palladius and the *Historia Monachorum* know nothing. I ventured in chapter iv. to use one of these anecdotes to illustrate the isolation of the earliest hermits from the Church. I may perhaps be permitted to instance this particular case as an illustration of the possibility of fixing the date of some of the Apophthegmata. It seems clear to me that a story which represents a solitary as tempted by the devil to receive the sacrament cannot have been the invention of a fifth-century writer. It cannot even belong to the period when the monks were accepting ordination and building churches. It must come to us from the first forty years of the fourth century. I have no doubt that the story as we have it has been added to and worked up. No one who has read Amélineau's description of the ways of Egyptian copyists will be surprised at any additions to an original which seemed bald and incomplete. The stress of the whole anecdote, however, falls upon the account of the diabolic temptation. The very fact of the literary completeness of the narrative as we have it seems a further witness to the early date of the original germ. It takes time for narrators

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and copyists to add and enlarge. A certain antiquity is presupposed when they do so boldly.

Amélineau,[1] in an investigation of the origin of the Apophthegmata which Butler seems to have overlooked, points out the interesting fact that these collections deal only[2] with monks of Lower and Middle Egypt. He characterises them as a kind of family register of the Scetic and Nitrian monasteries. This observation seems to me to militate against his theory of their having been originally written in Coptic. Had the collections been made by Copts in the Coptic language, they could scarcely have failed to embody some of the anecdotes of Schnoudi, which were in circulation in his Coptic biography before the end of the fifth century. Amélineau is in substantial agreement with Butler as to the date of the formation of the great collections of Apophthegmata.

I have been tempted to dwell rather longer on the criticism of these collections than on the other authorities for the period, partly because they have been less investigated than the others, and partly because I am conscious of having been greatly influenced by them in the judgment I have formed of the Egyptian ascetics. I am of opinion that they must be used, where they are anonymous, with very great caution, and are probably seldom of value for the investigation of facts; but I believe that they faithfully reflect the ideas of the fifth century, the last half of the fourth, and occasionally give us glimpses of the spirit of the very earliest period of the Egyptian monastic movement.

[1] *Vie de Schnoudi*, Preface, pp. 13, 14.

[2] Amélineau says: "Tous ceux dont les noms sont entourés de gloire ou simplement cités avec honneur sont des moines ayant vécu dans l'Égypte moyenne et dans la Basse-Egypte." This is not strictly true. There are some anecdotes of Syrian monks.

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## APPENDIX III

### THE HISTORY AND MEANING OF THE PATRISTIC DISTINCTION BETWEEN COUNSELS AND PRECEPTS

THOMAS AQUINAS[1] describes the difference between a counsel of perfection and an obligatory precept in these words: "A precept implies obligation. A counsel is left optional to the person to whom it is given. Thus in the new law, which is a law of liberty, counsels are given in addition to precepts. This is not so in the old law, which is a law of servitude. It is necessary, therefore, to understand that the precepts of the new law refer to such things as are necessary for the attainment of eternal beatitude; whereas the counsels have to do with the things through which man better and more swiftly achieves that end."

The precepts of the gospel are the simple laws of religion and morality—such as those which forbid murder, theft, and adultery. The counsels are suggestions of ways of devotion beyond the moral law—such as voluntary poverty and deliberate virginity. It is clear that the theoretical justification of the monastic life rests upon the validity of this distinction. It is not necessary that the monk himself should make the distinction, or even recognise it. It is not to be found at all frequently in early monastic litera-

[1] *Summa*, ii. 1.



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ture. It is rather to be sought in the writings of men who looked upon the movement with sympathy, and desired to justify it to the Church.

I propose here to trace in outline the history of the distinction through the literature of the first four centuries, and then to discover, if possible, what the early fathers meant by it, and how they came to make it.

In the *Shepherd* of Hermas we find the germ of the distinction in the following passages: "There is no sin in marrying again, but if they remain unmarried they gain greater honour and glory with the Lord."[1] "If you do any good beyond what is commanded by God, you will gain for yourself more abundant glory, and will be more honoured by God than you would otherwise be."[2]

By Tertullian the distinction is worked out in greater detail: "There is no place at all where we read that nuptials are prohibited; of course, on the ground that they are good. What, however, is better than this 'good' we learn from the apostle, who permits marriage indeed, but prefers abstinence."[3] "The apostle, with regard to widows and the unmarried, advises them to remain permanently in that state; but touching marrying in the Lord he no longer advises, but bids. Therefore, in this case, if we do not obey, we run a risk, because one may with more impunity neglect an 'advice' than an 'order'; in that the former springs from counsel and is proposed to the will; the other descends from authority, and is bound to necessity. In the former case, to disregard appears liberty, in the latter contumacy."[4] "Those who have come to the knowledge of sanctity (*i.e.* virginity) pursue it and prefer it, without detriment to marriage; not as if we superseded a

[1] *Mand.*, iv. 4. [2] *Sim.*, v. 3.
[3] *Ad ux.*, i. 3. [4] *Ibid.*, ii. 1.

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bad thing by a good, but only a good thing by a better. For we do not reject marriage, but simply abstain from it."[1] With these passages we may compare *De Monog.*, 11, and *De Pudic.*, 16.

St. Cyprian repeats the distinction almost in the language of Tertullian: "Nor does the Lord command this (*i.e.* virginity), but He exhorts it; nor does He impose the yoke of necessity, since the free choice of the will is left. But when He says that in His Father's house are many mansions, He points out the dwellings of a better habitation."[2] St. Cyprian has just before referred to our Lord's words in St. Matthew xix. 11.

In Origen's teaching a new idea on the subject is introduced and a new passage of Scripture referred to: "As long as anyone does only what is his duty, that is, the things which are commanded (*praecepta*), he is an unprofitable servant. But if you add anything to the precepts, then you are no longer an unprofitable servant."[3]

In the pseudo-Clementine epistles on virginity we have a return to the thought of Hermas: "He will give to virgins a notable place in the kingdom of God, better than the place of those who have passed a wedded life in sanctity."[4]

Methodius refers to the teaching of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, and teaches, as Tertullian does, the lawfulness of marriage, but the superior sanctity of the virgin state.[5]

St. Ambrose still further develops the idea of counsels as distinct from precepts, and is, I believe, the first to quote in this connection a passage of Scripture which has since

[1] *Adv. Marc.*, i. 29.
[2] *De habit. Virg.*, 23.
[3] *Rom.* iii. 3.
[4] *Ep. ad Virg.*, i. 4.
[5] *Conviv.*, iii. 13 and 14.



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become the standard quotation: [1] "An office [2] is either common or perfect, which we can with justice prove from the authority of the Scriptures. For we read in the gospel that the Lord said, 'If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.' And he said, 'What?' Jesus said to him, 'Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery,' etc. These are common offices, to which something is wanting. Then the young man said to Him, 'All these I have kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?' Jesus says to him, 'Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor.'" St. Ambrose then mentions certain other counsels from the Sermon on the Mount, and adds: "This, therefore, is a perfect office." Elsewhere he says:[3] "Where there is precept there is law. Where there is counsel there is grace. A precept recalls to nature. A counsel spurs towards grace." Further on in the same chapter he develops the thought of Origen: "So they who have fulfilled a precept may say, We are unprofitable servants. We have done that which we ought to have done. But this the virgin does not say, nor does he who has sold his goods; but as he who expects a reward laid up for him, like the holy apostle, he says, 'Lo, we have left all and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?' Not like the unprofitable servant does he say that he has done that which he ought. But as a servant useful to his Lord, who has multiplied the talents committed to him by usury, he securely waits for his reward. And so the Lord says to him and to the others, 'You who have followed Me shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'"

[1] *De Off.*, i. 11.

[2] The Latin is "officium," which I find it impossible here to translate; "common" is a rendering of "medium."

[3] *De Vid.*, xii.

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St. Augustine recognises the distinction, but adds nothing to its explanation, where he says: "Wherefore all God's commandments—one of which is, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery'—and all those precepts which are not commandments, but special counsels—one of which is, 'It is good for a man not to touch a woman'—are rightly carried out only when the motive principle of action is the love of God and the love of our neighbour in God."[1]

St. Jerome, as might be expected, states the distinction vigorously and definitely.[2] "Do not marvel, then, if, placed as we are amid temptations of the flesh and incentives to vice, the angelic life be not exacted of us, but merely recommended. If advice is given, a man is free to proffer obedience. If there be a commandment, he is a servant, and bound to compliance. Christ loves virgins more than others, because they willingly give what was not commanded them."

I have no doubt that many more passages, similar in sense, might be cited from the Christian writers of the first four centuries. The few which I have quoted will, however, afford sufficient material for determining what the early fathers meant by their distinction between counsels and precepts, and how they came to make it.

We notice everywhere a recognition of two kinds of Christian life, two separate ways in which men follow the Gospel teaching. Next, it is recognised that one of these ways is higher, completer, more glorious than the other, and inherits a specially great reward. Thirdly, that a man is free, without actually imperilling his ultimate salvation, to choose the higher way or the lower, from which it follows necessarily that he who chooses the higher does more than is absolutely commanded of him. There is

[1] *Enchir.*, 121. [2] *Adv. Jovin.*, i. 12.

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nothing more than these three points involved in the distinction.

Of these three, the first, that there are two ways of following the gospel teaching, is a matter of observed fact. The second, that one way is higher than the other, is a moral judgment pronounced upon the facts observed. The third, that the choice of either is free, is a thought about the facts. It is the result which reasoning minds arrived at in the effort to co-ordinate and systematise the things observed.

(1) I propose first to discuss whether or not the fact on which the reasoning worked was well observed. In other words, whether there are in reality two distinct kinds of Christian life, not shading off into each other, but separate absolutely as well as in degree. There can be no better or more familiar ground to work over than the narratives of the four gospels. Let us take (a), then, the question of marriage and virginity. It is clear that there is here no question of degree, of shading off. A man is either married or he is not. Christ, in the gospel, sanctioned and sanctified marriage. He blessed with His presence the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee. He uses, with reference to the marriage tie, words which imply the highest sanction, "Those whom *God* hath joined together, let not man put asunder." But He also speaks of some who, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven and for His sake, will do violence to their physical nature in refusing the marriage relationship (St. Matt. xix. 11), and intimates that a man may be in such a position as to hate wife and children for His sake. He Himself led a virgin life, and a literal following of His example would therefore involve celibacy. In this matter, then, the Christian writers observed their facts correctly. There were sanctioned by

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Christ these two ways of following Him, the way of the married life and the way of the virgin life, and that not the result of circumstance, such as the absence of passion or desire, but a fruit of self-conquest.

(β) Then there is the question of the possession of property, as opposed to voluntary poverty. On the one hand, we read of rich men who were the Lord's disciples. Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man, and to him was committed the sacred task of burying the crucified body of the Lord. Zacchæus was a man of considerable property, and he kept it after salvation had come to his house, although he cleared himself of dishonesty and purged his soul of greed by a great beneficence. On the other hand, St. Matthew, another publican, "rose up, left all"—money and the means of making money—in order to follow Jesus; and there was one whom the Lord desired to sell all that he had and give to the poor. Poverty and riches are, of course, comparative terms. There are degrees of poverty and degrees of riches, but the absolute poverty of a man who leaves all, or sells all and gives the proceeds away, is something different in kind from even the deepest poverty through which a man yet clings to what little he can call his own. Here, then, again there are two distinct ways of following Christ.

(γ) There are in the Sermon on the Mount these words, "Resist not evil." Ascetics, such as the Quakers, for instance, or Tolstoi, take these words literally, as, indeed, they must be taken if all meaning is not to be explained out of them. Taken thus, they necessitate the condemnation of the life of the soldier and the magistrate as necessarily unchristian. A soldier's business in life, at its best, is to resist evil. This is the highest and holiest work he can expect to be given in the course of his duties. A

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magistrate exists for the purpose of resisting and suppressing evil in the name of society. Therefore Tolstoi is perfectly consistent and logical in saying that a man can't be both a soldier and a Christian, cannot at the same time be a magistrate and an imitator of Christ. Yet in the course of His life Christ came into contact with both a soldier and a magistrate, and He condemned neither on account of his profession. On the contrary, He says of the soldier words of the highest praise, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." It was, then, possible to earn the Lord's commendation as a soldier. It was certainly possible to earn it by literal obedience to the words of the Sermon on the Mount.

We know that what existed in our Lord's time existed afterwards. There were married Christians, and Christians who abstained from marriage. There were rich Christians, and there were those who, like Origen and St. Cyprian, renounced their property. We may assume that what the Lord sanctioned during His life He sanctioned afterwards, and that it is in accordance with His will that there are these two different ways of following Him.

(2) So far we are dealing simply with fact. The fathers who wrote about counsels and precepts observed the facts. But man cannot rest content with simple observation. He is forced by his very nature to pronounce moral judgments upon them. This the fathers did when they called one life higher and the other lower, when they said that one was good and the other better. In doing so they conceived themselves, as we see by their quotations, to be following the doctrine of St. Paul. In reality I conceive that both they and St. Paul were following a deeply implanted instinct of human nature. A man may reason himself into quite opposite conclusions, but he will con-

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tinue always to admire most the greatest self-sacrifice. This becomes clear if we take an example outside the region of religious controversy. A certain sergeant in the army remains, during the whole course of a long war, at his regimental depôt. He drills recruits. This is the work he has been given to do by his commanding officer. It is his duty. Never once does he do without his dinner, or his comfortable night's sleep. Another sergeant is sent to the front. He endures hunger, fatigue, and sleeplessness. Finally, he sacrifices his life to save the honour of the army, or at some crucial moment to turn defeat into a victory. He also is where he is sent. His opportunity came to him in the course of duty. The other got no such opportunity, though he, too, did his duty. If we merely reason on the lives of these two men, we find it hard to distinguish between them. Nevertheless, we honour the one, and never think of the other. To the one our poets dedicate odes. We build him memorials in our churches. We teach our children to call him great. The other is buried after a while and forgotten. Why? Because human nature, being what it is, we cannot help ourselves. We must pay the greater honour to the life of greater sacrifice.

The fathers followed the same instinct when they called the ascetic life a higher life. Indeed, they had more justification than the world has for its judgments, for all following of Christ involves some self-sacrifice, and it seems obvious that a greater sacrifice is a sign of worthier service.

That the fathers should also have believed that the greater heavenly reward fell to those who lived the greater lives on earth is very natural. The New Testament teaches that there are different degrees of reward, as there

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are different severities of punishment. It is not possible to conceive of their being given otherwise than in proportion to the *greatness* of the earthly life.

So far, then, the thought of the early Church on this subject is so entirely natural that it is hard to conceive of anyone thinking otherwise. The judgment which called the ascetic life the higher was not so much the result of any reasoning as the simple expression of a general feeling. Granted a Christian consciousness working upon facts as they were, and the result was inevitable.

(3) It is the third point in the teaching of the fathers which is the heart of the matter. Granted, and one can hardly help granting, the fact that there are two ways of living the Christian life; granted that we cannot avoid calling the one life higher, that is completer than the other —it remains to ask whether men in general or whether particular individuals have free choice of the two ways. The early Church said that the choice was free. A Christian without actual sin may refuse the life of virginity or the life of voluntary poverty, even when they have been presented to him. Here, again, the thought of the fathers is entirely natural. It is exactly the opinion which we should expect men to hold. The facts before the eyes of men were such as these. Here is a Christian, who is a husband and a father, who holds a great property, and is rich. He is loving, reverent, pure, charitable. He is undeniably and really a follower of Christ. Here also is St. Antony. He might have been rich too, but he gave his property away. He might have known the joys of human love and fatherhood, but instead he lives wifeless, childless, homeless, in a desert cave. He, too, is undeniably a Christian. It seems very obvious that St. Antony had before him a choice of ways, and chose the

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harder. He would not have sinned if he had kept his property. He would not have sinned if he had married. He might, doubtless would, as a landlord and a father have been a good man. He preferred to be better than good. This is the way the fathers thought about these facts. Whether it is a right or wrong way, we cannot deny that it is an extremely simple and natural way. Indeed, it is so natural that hardly anyone thought otherwise until after the Protestant Reformation.

Protestants, owing to the exigencies of their controversial position, were forced to reject this natural line of thought. The whole teaching of the Church about counsels and precepts was passed under review. It was felt to be an undeniable fact that there were two ways along which men lived as Christians. The judgment about higher or lower was felt to be unimportant and perhaps inevitable. The point fixed upon for dispute was this question, whether or not a man had a choice of two ways. For instance, Protestants gladly recognised the merchant, who grew rich honestly and spent his riches charitably, as a Christian. They recognised also that a missionary who gathered no wealth in life, who lived in hardship and perhaps died a martyr, was also a Christian. They probably felt, even when they did not say, that he was a greater kind of Christian than the merchant. At this point the Protestant controversialist breaks away from the teaching of the fathers. Neither the merchant nor the missionary, so the new thought ran, had any choice. God placed the merchant in his shop. God bid him be diligent, honest, and charitable. He did his duty and no less when he lived the life God set before him in the best way possible. God also bid the missionary give up the prospect of being rich and comfortable. God bid him go forth into heathen lands.



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He did his duty and no more when he obeyed the voice that bid him go. That God laid on him a duty which is not laid on most men matters nothing. To him it was a duty when God laid it on him. He had to go forth, leave all, and give up even life itself in the end. Otherwise he would have incurred the blame of disobedience to the heavenly voice.

This position is quite intelligible and reasonable, even if it is not so simple and obvious as the other. It also fairly faces and fairly covers the facts of the case. It has been best expressed, I think, by Rothe, when he defines a counsel as the application of a general principle to an individual moral instance. The words, "Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor," are, according to this view, the application of the command—"Thou shalt not steal"—to the particular instance of one man. They may be similarly addressed to others whose characters and circumstances are like his. To him and to them they are as absolutely binding as the original command is to every man. He to whom the words are spoken has no choice of ways at all. He must either decide to obey or be prepared to perish. His way of life, if he obeys, may be regarded as higher when compared to the lives of the majority of men. It is not a higher life as compared to any other life possible for him to live, for it is the only way open to him of being a Christian at all.

If I have succeeded in understanding this line of thought correctly, I find that it involves me in a serious moral dilemma. Here is a commandment of God—"Thou shalt not commit adultery." If a man deliberately and perseveringly refuses obedience to this commandment—if he lives unrepentant to the end of his days in this particular sin—he clearly lives outside the circle of the grace of God.

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So far as God's revelation in the New Testament teaches us, that man on the day of judgment must be set upon the left hand. There is no possibility, so far as we can see, but that the Judge should say to him, "Depart, thou cursed." But there are men to whom God shows the value of a perfectly virgin life. There are those, the Lord Himself tells us, who for His sake will renounce marriage. According to Rothe's definition, a call to virginity is an application of the general principle contained in the seventh commandment to the particular case of the man who receives the call. But perhaps through weakness of the flesh this man refuses to obey the call. He marries. Has he sinned? To the end of his life he does not repent. He goes down into the grave knowing that his life might have been greater if he had accepted the vocation; yet well aware that marriage is no offence in the sight of the Almighty. Is this man in the same position exactly as the unrepentant adulterer? According to Rothe's reasoning he is. But the thought is utterly intolerable. State it nakedly, and all consciences revolt against it.

Again, there is a command—"Thou shalt not steal." He who refuses obedience to it and dies unrepentant perishes. There does not seem to be any other possibility. But God sometimes says to man, "Sell all that thou hast." This, we are told, is the application of the general principle to the individual moral instance of this man. If he clings to his property, through weakness of the will, he transgresses the divine command. Though, like Zacchæus, he restore fourfold all he has dishonestly acquired and give half of his goods to the poor, yet it is no use. He is still in the same position as another who has enriched himself throughout the whole of a long life by robbery of the widow and the orphan. Can we believe such things as these? Do not

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heart and conscience alike cry out against conclusions so frightful?

I am not concerned here to enter upon a theological discussion about the accuracy of the patristic teaching on counsels and precepts. I wish to do no more than to show that it was the result of reasonable and pious thought about facts which forced themselves upon the attention. I do not suppose that any other way of co-ordinating the facts suggested itself to the fathers at all. The Protestant theory was never presented to them. Their own view was so simple and natural that it did not occur to them to cast round for any other. Even when they proceeded to reason from the view of facts which they accepted, the process was very brief and very inevitable. There are two ways of Christian living. This the fathers saw. One is higher than the other. This they felt. Men, or some men, have a choice between the two. This is at first sight obvious. From the position so arrived at Origen and St. Ambrose proceeded to argue that he who accepts the higher way does more than he is obliged to do; gives something more than is required of him. This seems a perfectly logical advance upon the accepted premises.

It was, however, just the ultimate consequence of this advance which gave occasion to the Protestant revolt against the whole position. There gradually emerged the strange conception that these works beyond what was required were in some way stored up by the Church, as a kind of fund upon which she might draw for the benefit of disobedient children. The treasury of heavenly merit was shamelessly bartered for earthly coin in the selling of indulgences. An extraordinarily complex system gathered round the originally simple position of the fathers. The practical issue of it, however, was eminently easy to under-

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stand. For so much payment you obtain remission of so much punishment for sin. This was a revolting doctrine. The preaching of it forms the justification of the Protestants when they went back, to cut away, as they conceived, the root from which it sprang by rejecting the patristic position about counsels and precepts.

I do not think that the theory of a treasury of merits need have followed from what St. Ambrose taught about works done beyond what are required. Up to that point there was nothing in the Church's teaching to revolt enlightened consciences. On the contrary, it was capable of affording, and did actually afford, an impulse towards the very completest Christian self-sacrifice and the very noblest Christian endeavour. There was ever before men's thoughts the conception of an altogether unworldly life, a life like the angels' life, like Christ's own life, a perfect life. The supreme self-sacrifice, the giving up of all that men prize and find good, was continually set forth as the greatest possibility of Christian life. The Church did not shrink from preaching an exceeding great reward hereafter for those who dare greatly now. She did not fear to urge men everywhere to strive hard for a place amid

> "All that chivalry of His—
> Those soldier saints who row on row
> Burn upwards each to his point of bliss."

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